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NEW YORK NAT'S TRUMP CARD; OR, THE Dare-Devil Detective's Draw.

By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.



"SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LEAGUE TO-NIGHT. INFORM YOUR LIST, CHUB," SAID NEW YORK NAT.

New York Nat's Trump Card;

OR, THE

Dare Devil Detective's Draw.

A Story of the Crooks and Crook
Catchers of the Metropolis.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS SHADOWER.

"Oh, sir, help me, for I am starving to death!"

The words were pleadingly uttered, the face white and the whole appearance of the one who thus begged for aid that of a man who really suffered both physically and mentally.

The form was bent, the hair and beard unkempt and the clothing scant and in tatters.

The man stood under a gaslight, in the up-town section of the city, as though to let his appearance plead for pity, and the one he addressed was hurrying along toward a West Side car.

He was a man of fine appearance, tall, finely dressed and with handsome features.

He gave a glance at the pleading face, the outstretched hand, hesitated, looked again and halted, while throwing open his coat he took out a well filled wallet and said in a kindly tone:

"I feel sorry for you, my man, and every one in distress. This may relieve your wants for awhile."

He took out a dollar bill, hesitated, put it back, his fingers resting for a moment upon a two dollar bill, then changing to a five and this he drew out from among the others and handed it to the man.

"Oh, sir! may Heaven bless you, and—"

"Never mind the thanks, my man, but tell me how far it is to the nearest down-town car?"

"You could catch the Elevated cars at One Hundred and Thirty-fifth street, if—"

"No, I prefer the surface road."

"I will show you, sir."

The man went along ahead, apparently walking with an effort, and clutching his five-dollar note tightly in his hand, yet glancing at it when he passed under each gas-lamp.

The night was dark and misty, threatening a fog, and the beggar and the well-dressed stranger went along at a rapid walk until a passing car was found, and with a pleasant nod of thanks to his guide the generous man hailed the car and was soon seated within it.

But he did not notice that the beggar ran along under the shadow of the trees, keeping even with the car, and, as he ran began to make a decided change in his appearance.

First a false beard and wig were removed, the old derby hat gave place to a slouch, and, as he ran the light-colored overcoat was taken off, turned and proved to be black on the other side and by no means ragged.

A run of a couple of blocks was sufficient to make these changes, the car stopping twice; meanwhile, and then cutting across the beggar leaped upon the front platform and cast a quick glance to see if the stranger was there.

He saw him in the corner nearest to him, under the light and looking over some official papers he had taken from a large leather wallet.

Taking a handful of change from his pocket the beggar paid his fare, the act revealing that he need not have gone hungry with a few dollars in his pocket besides the bill which had been given him.

The car continued on down-town slowly,

giving the stranger time to look over all of his papers, and for which reason he had doubtless gone by the slower way rather than by the Elevated.

He got off among the West Forties, and the beggar did the same.

A short walk brought him to a handsome residence whose steps he ascended and rung the bell.

He was soon admitted, the transmogrified beggar waiting outside.

Half an hour passed, when the door opened and the stranger reappeared, and with him a young man also fashionably attired.

They walked toward Broadway and Forty-second street together, the beggar close at their heels—so close that he heard his patron say:

"Well, Walter, I must leave you here, for I shall take a hack and drive back up-town, as Norris will be in by that time."

"Half an hour will do to settle my business with him, and then I shall drive down to the steamer, which sails with the early morning tide."

"Good-by, Walter, until we meet again, months hence, upon my return."

The two clasped hands warmly, then parted—one to return to his home, while the other leaped into a *coupe* and gave the coachman an order.

"It was the house that he came out of up-town, so I can take the Elevated train and get there ahead of him," and the beggar shadower ran for the Sixth Avenue Elevated Station nearest and was soon being whirled rapidly up-town.

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTCAST HEIR.

THE Forty-second street house which the stranger had entered was a handsome brown stone mansion in the fashionable part of New York, and the servant ushered the visitor into a very cozy sitting-room where a young man sat enjoying his after-dinner cigar.

He was in dressing gown and slippers, and there was an air about all as though it was a bachelor's home.

The young man had a handsome face and form: his complexion was darkly bronzed, as though from exposure, and he had a frank, brusque manner about him that was very attractive.

One glance at his visitor and he cried:

"Keene Mountjoy, by the gods of war!"

"Yes, Walter, and I am only flying through the city, as I go by steamer at dawn to Europe."

"Sit down and tell me all about yourself, Keene."

"I have but a few minutes, as I went up to see attorney, Gray Norris, at his house on a Hundred and thirty-fifth street, hoping to spend the evening with you; but he was out, so I ran down to give you a call, and must then return, as Norris has considerable money for me."

"And so you have turned farmer, eh?"

"Yes. My uncle made me his heir, so I am rich, yes, very rich. But, my wealth does not lie easily upon my conscience, Walter, so I have come to ask you to help me do an act of justice, at least looking at it from my standpoint."

"What is it, Keene, for you know I'll do anything in my power for the old friend who was so good to me in my early college days, like a big brother to me in fact, for I believe you are some half a dozen years my senior."

"More than that, Walter, for I am thirty-five. Why, I have a daughter nearly thirteen!"

"How time flies!"

"Yes, and you have never married? Why, man, you do not know how happy a man can be when he gives up bachelor life; but alas! my wife died some years ago and

I have to be both father and mother to my little daughter Ethel. But, let me tell you my story."

"I shall be glad to listen indeed."

"First I am going to ask you if you ever met a face that haunted you?"

"Yes, now and then."

"Well, I met one to-night, a beggar, a man in tatters who told me he was starving."

"One look into his face and I stopped."

"I intended to give him a dollar, then ended by handing him five."

"You were generous."

"Somehow his face demanded it of me, and since I left him he has fairly haunted me, for somewhere have I seen him before and under strangest circumstances. But to my story."

"I had an uncle in Maryland, my father's brother, and after leaving college I went to see him and thank him for the education he had given me."

"He had an elegant old mansion and farm and was very rich."

"He had an only son who had been a disappointment to him, had led a wild life, had been involved in a fatal duel, and gave his father so much trouble that he banished him from his home forever."

"The night I arrived I heard a shot in the house and cry for help."

"I dashed in to find my old uncle struggling with two men, both masked, while a third lay dead upon the floor, the old gentleman having shot him."

"I went to his rescue, felled one of the men with my cane, and grappled with the other, tearing off his mask."

"My uncle uttered a cry of horror, the man tore away from my grasp, and, with the one whom I had knocked down, sprung through the window and fled."

"The one whom I had unmasked was my uncle's son! He had come there to rob his own father, knowing that he had a large sum of money in the house!"

"My uncle had been wounded by the man he had killed, and I at once sought aid, the servants being in an out-house."

"It was weeks before uncle recovered, and I nursed him as though he had been my own father, for, although he had paid for my education we had never met before."

"He told me of his son's evil career, but begged me to keep the secret that he had been one of the robbers to enter his home, and I have never spoken of it until this moment."

"As my uncle insisted that I should live with him, telling me that he was getting old, and that I must care for the place, I did so, and, six months after, I married the beautiful girl my erring cousin had been in love with, and had killed a rival whom he believed she cared for more than she did for him."

"I took my wife to the old home, Wavelands they call it, and when my uncle died three years ago he left me his heir."

"But, Walter, let me tell you that I feel my cousin, the outcast, is the direct heir, and also let me add this incident. Once when bathing in the surf at Long Branch, I was seized with a cramp. A stranger swam out, and, at the risk of his own life, after a desperate struggle saved me from death."

"I never could find that stranger, but when I unmasked the man in my uncle's home that night, I recognized my rescuer in my cousin!"

"Now I am going to Paris, where I heard he last was, to find him and offer him one half the fortune left to me."

"You wrote me that you had turned amateur detective, having in some strange manner become allied with a band of young ferrets here in New York; so I came to have you look for this man I am in search of in New York, while I go to Paris on a like mission."

"If I can find him I will share with the outcast heir the fortune left to me; but if I

do not find him, I shall have eased my conscience by trying, at least.

"Will you undertake the work, and let expense not stand in the way?"

"Yes, I will put my Boy Police upon the work at once, Keene, and if he is to be found they will unearth him. When they have the right material to work on they usually succeed."

"It is all here, name, age, description and the places he has frequented." Keene Mountjoy placed a package of papers, with several photographs in the hands of Walter Vanderlip, who promised:

"My young shadowers shall go on his track to-morrow."

Ten minutes after, Walter Vanderlip and Keene Mountjoy left the house together, the beggar shadowing them as has been seen.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEGGAR'S PLOT.

THE beggar who had taken the Elevated Road to reach the address to which Keene Mountjoy was going far up-town, got off at the station nearest to the place and entered a hardware store the doors of which were just closing for the night.

He made a purchase there, and entering a saloon bought a flask of whisky.

Then he made his way rapidly along until he saw a carriage drive up to a door and halt.

A gentleman got out, and when he entered the house the beggar shadower at once began to stagger along as though drunk.

The street was a quiet one, and as it was then nearly eleven o'clock few persons were passing.

Humming a roystering song in a low voice he staggered up against the hack, raised his hat and said in a drunken way:

"Scuse me, sir—I didn't see you. Will you take a drink with me?"

"I only wishes that I c'u'd, only I can't leave my horse," was the answer.

"Don't have to, fer I've got it along—the very best the market affords. Help yourself."

The coachman did help himself, taking advantage of the man's supposed drunkenness to drink a double allowance.

Then the beggar pretended to take a drink, put the flask in his pocket, but almost immediately taking it out again said:

"Scuse me—take a drink."

The second drink was taken, as was a third, and then the generous beggar passed on around the corner.

There he stood for awhile watching the coachman, whose head soon dropped forward and he was seen to be fast asleep.

Then the beggar crept to the carriage, took from his pocket a wrench, and unscrewed the nut from the rear off wheel, for it had been to purchase a wrench that he had gone into the hardware store.

Going back around the corner he had quietly waited until he saw the gentleman come out of the house, and, after some difficulty in arousing the coachman, enter the vehicle and drive away.

At a swinging trot the beggar followed, muttering quietly to himself:

"I won't have to run far."

Nor did he, for with a crash the freed wheel ran off of the axle after going a few squares, and the coachman was tumbled from his box.

Fortunately for the passenger the horse was gentle and stopped, a circumstance that caused the beggar to utter an oath of disappointment.

The coachman was not hurt, however, save a slight shaking up, and the gentleman leaped out with the remark:

"This is a bad business, my man; but, accidents will happen.

"Here is your money, so tell me where I can catch a car."

"Ah, sir, an unfortunate accident indeed—

a car did you say, sir?" and the beggar approached.

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to the nearest car now, sir, if you will allow me to direct you; but, I had better stop at the stable, my man, and send help to you."

"Yes, sir, if you please, for I'm in a bad fix. Ask them to bring me an axle-nut, sir," said the coachman, now getting over his accident.

"I will;—this way, sir," and the beggar led the way down the street leading toward the North River.

It was a street with but few buildings upon it, save here and there a wooden shanty or old house allowed to go to ruin as the growing city surrounded it.

"Are you sure you are right?" asked Keene Mountjoy, little dreaming that his guide was the beggar whom he had so generously aided several hours before, and who had shadowed him ever since.

"Yes, sir, I know the city well, but you are a stranger, I take it?"

"Yes, I have not been in New York for many years."

"If you are going far down-town, sir, a ferry leaves the foot of this next street at midnight, and we are in time. It is faster than the cars."

"I am going down to the Cunard Wharf, sir."

"Then it is your best way to go, by the ferry. There is a cut across lots that I am familiar with."

The beggar led the way by a winding path among the rocks, with here and there a shanty, until at last coming to an old-time house crumbling to decay, he suddenly turned and with a quick blow brought the iron wrench hard down upon the head of Keene Mountjoy, who, with a low-moan sunk in his tracks, while from the lips of his assailant came the words:

"It was his destiny to die by my hand."

CHAPTER IV.

"DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES."

THE night was dark; there were no gas-lights in that desolate region and no one was near to see the deed.

The man who had so suddenly turned and struck the blow, quickly bent over the prostrate form lying in a heap as it had fallen, and raised it in his arms with the ease of great strength, in spite of his pleading cry for food and the assertion that he was starving.

He bore the form in among the shadow of the trees surrounding the deserted homestead, ascended the creaking steps of the long piazza, halted at the door, which he opened with a key taken from his pocket, and still holding the body upon his shoulders.

Entering a broad hallway he stopped at a door on the right and another key opened it.

Placing the form upon the floor he struck a match and lighted a lamp.

The room was comfortably furnished, with a lounge, rug, table, easy-chair, a shelf of books and through an open door were visible some cooking utensils, a table, cot-bed and a cupboard.

Upon the walls of the first room were a score of paintings of merit, some of them unfinished. A portrait of a beautiful young girl was upon an easel, and needed but a few more touches to complete it.

In the light of the lamp the beggar's face was seen to be a strong one, bold in expression, intelligent, handsome, yet marred with a look of cruelty and cynicism that was very marked.

His form was elegant, his hands and feet small, and upon the wall hung a lot of clothing, while a pair of foils, boxing gloves, Indian clubs, a belt with two revolvers, and a handsome sword were also visible.

Placing the limp form upon the floor, face upward, the one who had begged for food felt his victim's pulse with the air of a man who knew what he was about.

"Not dead, though that blow must have fractured the skull.

"Well, if he is not dead, he must die, that is certain, for dead men tell no tales.

"Let me see what this night's work is worth to me.

"Ah! a watch and chain, both of value, a diamond stud, and sleeve buttons of the same precious stones; but, these must be laid aside as useless just now.

"Now I come to what is useful, this wallet of money, and these papers may be of value when looked over.

"Yes, there is all of, let me see, five thousand dollars in Uncle Sam's money right here.

"It is a rich haul."

He counted the money over slowly, then looked over the papers, and his face was crossed by a grim smile as now and then he read something that seemed to interest him most deeply.

Suddenly a groan came to his ears and he started, his face suddenly paling.

"Bah! I am no coward to start at the groan of a dying man.

"By Heaven, but it is nearing dawn, and I must get rid of this body, and quickly.

"If he is not dead, he soon will be, for I shall set him adrift in the river, and with arms bound so that, should the water revive him, he must drown.

"Yes, I must get him away from here, for I would not bring suspicion upon the artist who is so friendly with all the police.

"No, I must be the last man to be suspected, and I can soon reach the river unseen.

He took a rope from a corner of the room, bound the victim's arms behind him, and then again raising his burden, when he had hidden the things taken from him, he left the old house, whose single occupant he was, and locking the door after him, hastily walked toward the river, distant only several hundred yards.

Reaching the shore he placed the body upon a wide board lying there, and then shoved it out into the river with the remark:

"It is blowing fresh off shore, and the waves will soon wash him off the plank and that will be the end."

The board, with its human freight shoved hard off from the shore, soon disappeared from the view of the murderer in the darkness.

After trying hard to pierce the gloom and gain another look at the floating form, the man muttered to himself:

"Now I can go, for dead men tell no tales."

He turned away in the early light of coming dawn, walked a short distance and again glanced over the river.

But there was a slight mist and it shut in the waters so that he could not see far from the shore, and the sight of that white, up-turned face, with its red gash over the forehead and bound arms, was denied to him.

"Oh I need have no fear, for he is doomed. When the sea gives up its dead he may appear against me, but what care I then?"

"No, no, so long as he does not reappear in this world I care not," and assuming an indifference, if he did not feel it, the murderer returned to his room in the old mansion.

CHAPTER V.

A GIRL TO THE RESCUE.

UPON the banks of the Hudson River, watching the sun rise and dispel the mist that floated over the waters, a young girl stood evidently wrapped up in admiration of the scene, though often before had she gazed upon it, for her home was in a cozy little cottage only a short distance away.

The girl was young, scarcely over seventeen, and her face was one of rare beauty and strength of character for one of her years.

She was neatly dressed, and her form was willowy and yet compact, while the flush of perfect health was upon her face.

As she stood gazing out upon the waters her eyes suddenly became fixed upon a dark object that met her gaze.

She rubbed her eyes, as though doubting what they revealed to her, looked again and then ran rapidly toward the cottage and disappeared.

But, in a minute, she came out upon the piazza, leveled a field glass at the object that had attracted her, and almost instantly went flying down toward the shore.

There was a small sail-boat anchored off the shore, and a skiff half drawn out upon the land.

With a strength one would not believe she possessed, she launched the skiff, sprung in to it, seized the oars and pulled rapidly off upon the waters.

The wind was blowing fresh, and once out from under the lee of the land she caught a rough sea.

But this she did not seem to heed, and glancing around to see that she had shaped her course aright, she pulled with a skillful and vigorous stroke further out among the white-capped waves of the river.

A schooner far on the other shore, a steam-boat coming down the stream, but yet a couple of miles away, and a steam yacht flying along in the early morning, were the only crafts visible just then upon the river.

The young girl however seemed not to dread being comparatively alone upon the waters, and occasionally turning her head, to see that the object was still in view, she kept up the swift, strong stroke.

She had nearly reached it, and the waves were running higher, when once more turning her head she uttered a startled cry as she saw the human form she had been rowing so hard to reach, suddenly washed off from the heavy board that had been supporting it.

With tremendous strokes she now pulled directly for the form, which, as it was tossed upon a wave, she saw was bound, and, as she now believed, that life was extinct.

But an instant more and her skiff was alongside, and leaning over the brave girl rescuer grasped the form with a strength which the waves could not break loose.

It was no easy task for her to drag the form into her boat, but she was determined. She saw that the man was not dead; and in the end she was successful.

She was now some distance above her home, the tide and wind having carried her along, but she set to work to row back, but first to pull close inshore where she would not feel the strength of the waves and tidal current.

As she neared the shore and glanced around, she beheld a carriage and pair of horses close to the water's edge, a coachman in livery seated upon the box, and a young man stylishly dressed standing near watching her.

He had evidently seen her bold rescue, and as she came nearer he called out:

"Come ashore, miss, and I will aid you, if it is not too late."

"No, sir, thank you, it is not too late, for he is alive, though unconscious."

"It was a brave rescue you made, miss, for I was watching you, and sorry I could not help."

"I expected every moment to see you go over—Hal! this is one I know!"

"Quick, James, dismount and help me with him into the carriage, and then drive with all speed—you will go with me, miss?"

"No, thank you, sir; my home is not far away, and I will row down to it."

"May I ask where you live, miss?"

"At the Widow Herbert's cottage below, sir."

"I will see you again and report how our friend is."

"It is a most mysterious affair, his being bound and with this blow on the head; it shows foul work," and, having placed the form in the carriage, he gave an order to the coachman and the vehicle rolled rapidly away, leaving the young girl standing upon the shore watching its departure.

A moment she stood thus; then springing into her boat she rowed rapidly down to her cottage, keeping close inshore.

As she landed she heard the words:

"Ah, Olive, you ought not to go out upon the river before breakfast, and especially in such a blow, for it is dangerous."

She sprung ashore and was confronted by a youth seemingly about her own age, and possessing an athletic form, striking face, full of daring and indomitable will.

"Nat, I went out upon the river to save a human life. A dastardly crime has been committed which you and your Boy Police must run to earth," was the young girl's response.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG FERRET CHIEF.

THE youth seemed surprised at the words of the young girl, and said:

"You are true as steel, Olive, and never make mistakes, but I don't understand just what track you are on now."

"I will explain, Nat, and you will see."

"I am an early riser as you know, and you having told me last night you would come to breakfast, I got up before sunrise, and came out here on the shore."

"I saw, as I glanced over the waters, what I at first supposed an upturned boat far out in the river."

"Then it seemed as though I could see some one clinging to it, and I ran in and got my glass."

"That showed me a man lying on a plank."

"I at once ran to my skiff and pulled out to it, and a hard pull it was."

"I should think so, with the river so rough off-shore."

"You took a big risk, my sister, and should be more careful."

"I deemed a human life at stake, Nat, and it is worth a risk to save one."

"I got to the floating form, just as a wave toppled the broad board over and washed it off."

"I grasped the man, and found he was alive, but seemingly unconscious, and his hands were bound behind him."

"Ah! this does look like a crime."

"Yes, Nat, and he had a gash to the bone in the forehead, just where the parting in his hair was."

"I pulled ashore with him, when a gentleman who was taking a ride in his carriage hailed me, and he took the man at once to a physician, he said, and would let me know later about him, for he recognized him."

"That was strange."

"It did seem a coincidence that he should be there in his carriage at the very time he was needed, and saw me make the rescue."

"Did you know him, Olive?"

"No, Nat; I never saw him before; but his driver was in livery and it was a stylish turn-out."

"And the man you rescued?"

"Was well dressed and a gentleman apparently, a very handsome man."

"Had he any jewelry on?"

"Nothing that I noticed."

"Then he had been attacked with a blow, robbed, and set adrift to drown, in case he should not be dead, which his assailants doubtless believed to be the case."

"Yes, that must have been the way of it; but I suppose the gentleman who carried

him away will call, for I gave him my address."

"Perhaps, and perhaps not, for he may be interested himself."

"You have a way of jumping at the bottom facts of a case, Nat, that is remarkable."

"You were really born for a detective, and I don't wonder at your success as the chief of the Unknown Boy Police, who lend the chief of the Secret Service so much aid, yet mystify him completely."

"And much of our success is due to my little sister alone, who is herself a masked mystery to my Boy Ferrets, and can play a part with any of them as a shadower, in fact well deserves the title she has won of the Queen of the Unknown Vigilantes."

"But let us go in to breakfast, and then I must rig out in some disguise and go down and call upon Mr. Vanderlip and talk this mysterious matter over with him, of the man you found afloat on a board, and bound and wounded."

The two ferrets, for such the brother and sister were, entered the house together, and an hour after it would take a very keen and practiced eye to recognize the youth when he came out in a complete disguise.

He went over to the nearest line of cars, got on a car going down-town, leaped off at Forty—street and rung the bell at the house which Keene Mountjoy had visited the night before.

The servant who came to the door saw a youth wearing gold-rimmed glasses, long hair, and who had the look of a seedy young artist, peddling his own work, for he carried a large portfolio under his arm.

"The master don't want nothin'," and the servant looked as though he intended to give the youth the bounce, when the latter said:

"Don't he? Well, see if you want that," and he slipped half a dollar into the man's hand.

"Waal, I does, and maybe you kin sell him suthin', arter all."

"I'll give yer a try at him, anyway, for I don't believe in bein' 'ard on a man workin' for a livin'—see?"

"Yes, I see that you saw."

"Trot me in, Boots, and if I get the custom there's more in it for you."

The butler left the youth standing in the hall while he went back to the cozy sitting-room where Walter Vanderlip was reading the morning papers.

"A young man to see you, sir."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know, sir; but I guess he hain't no beggar."

"Find out his business."

"He half told me, sir, it was private."

"Show him in," was the answer.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY SHADOWERS' ALLY.

"WELL, young man, what can I do for you?" said Walter Vanderlip in a kindly tone, as the young ferret entered.

The latter closed the door and said in a low voice:

"Must I introduce myself every time I come, Mr. Vanderlip?"

"New York Nat you are a wonder! I no more knew you than I would the man in the moon if he called."

"I never saw any one who could change his whole appearance as you do so often and well."

"But, I am glad you have come, as I have work for you, though first tell me what trail you are on now?"

And Walter Vanderlip motioning the youth to a seat, laid aside his papers.

"Well, sir, I am selling pictures to-day, but not to you, as I came to see you upon an important find which Olive has made."

"Indeed! what has the fair Queen been discovering this time?"

"A man in the river, sir, floating on a board, and with his hands bound and a gash on his head which may, or may not be fatal."

"Ah! that is a strange find, indeed. Who is he and where is he?"

"I do not know who he is, sir, or where he is, but I thought I would come and tell you the story, and you could place it before the Secret Service Chief as you now do for us, and thus enable us to remain unknown to him."

"Tell me your story, New York Nat, and we will talk it all over."

Nat told the story just as he had gotten it from Olive, the Boy Ferrets' Girl Queen, and when he had heard him to the end Walter Vanderlip said thoughtfully:

"Nat, I came to this city as a tenderfoot, as we would say, just off of a ranch in Arizona, and but for you the night of my arrival, I would have lost my life."

"Through you and your sister Olive I was saved, and so got my fortune and live in luxury, and I would be base indeed did I refuse to help you in your schemes as Unknown Detectives."

"I appreciate all that you have gone through, with yourself forced to become a boy outcast, as your sister was driven to working for an Italian organ-grinder and flower-seller."

"I know that what you two passed through made you, as it were, gamins, and turned your thoughts into the channel of detective work, causing you to organize your band of young Ferrets, or Vigilantes, as you like to call them, from the very material best suited for Secret Service workers."

"You have dragged these boys from lives of crimes, and shadowed futures, to lives of honor and hope for the future of better things."

"Afraid to make yourselves known to the chiefs of police and Secret Service, you have in each instance given secret warnings of plots to commit crimes, and of crimes committed, until you began to communicate through me, still keeping your identity unknown."

"Now it was my intention to run away on a trip abroad, but I concluded only last night that, as you have honored me with your confidence, I would remain and help you, become your ally in reality and do all in my power to aid you and your Vigilantes, and shield you from a discovery by the police and detectives, until in your own good time you desire to make yourselves known, when your many valuable services as crook-catchers will have commanded the recognition you deserve from the authorities."

"Now, Nat, you understand my position, that I am a bachelor, a man of wealth and leisure, so command my aid at all times as your ally."

New York Nat at once arose and held out his hand, while he said feelingly:

"You have already been so good to me, to us, Mr. Vanderlip, that I know not how to thank you; but we appreciate it, and you can indeed help us, for I am determined that we shall not be known to the chief of police, and Secret Service officers, save as Unknown Ferrets, until we have, by our good work, gained a pardon for all deeds some of my boys may have been guilty of."

"Again I thank you, sir, and now what is to be done about this case that Olive has found?"

"I will see the chief, tell him of the rescue, and learn what information he has of any one being missing."

"Yes, sir, that may discover who the gentleman is, and lead to the finding out why, and by whom he was attacked and then bound and sent to a sure death upon that plank, for he was not tied to it, only his hands bound, Olive says."

"Well, the chief shall have the full particulars, and see what can be found out about him; but now I have something of

importance for you to act upon, you and your Boy Ferrets."

"I am ready, sir," was the prompt reply of New York Nat.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN OF MANY MASKS.

"THE case I have in hand for you, Nat," said Walter Vanderlip, taking a large envelope from his desk, "was placed in my hands last night by an old friend, who was a senior at college when I was a freshman."

"I formed a strong friendship for him then, and we have corresponded in a way that has prevented us losing sight of each other."

"He was educated by a rich uncle, and I will tell you his story as he told it to me, for he sailed this morning for Paris to look up his cousin, who in honor he feels should share his fortune with him."

"I am giving you his story so as to enable you to act intelligently in your search, though it need be made known to none of your band, save the Girl Queen, whose advice is always good."

The story of Keene Mountjoy was then told, and also of the wild cousin's duel, his attempt to rob his father, who had been wounded by one of the men with him, and one of whom had been killed by the old man.

The discarding of the son was also told, while Keene Mountjoy having discovered that he owed his life to that same wayward cousin, and believing, no matter what were his sins, he was really the rightful heir, had decided to share equally with him the inheritance.

"Now, Nat," Walter Vanderlip went on, "my friend Mountjoy is anxious to lose no time in tracing his outcast cousin, for as the affair of the duel was not pressed against him, and his intended robbery of his father was kept a secret, there is no reason why he should not return home and lead a different life, and Mountjoy in the nobleness of his nature, is anxious to accomplish this end."

"He last heard of him in Paris, so he has gone abroad himself to search for him, while, also knowing that he lived for a long time in New York, he wishes to set you to look him up here, and I promised that you would do so."

"Certainly, sir."

"Now he is rich, and is willing to spare no expense in the search, and offered a reward of five thousand dollars for the discovery of this outcast heir, or proof of his death."

"A very liberal sum, sir, and I hope the Boy Police can earn it."

"I sincerely hope so, Nat."

"Now, sir, the name and particulars, please."

"Here they are, with a couple of photographs, though the latter were taken some dozen years ago, and he is now that much older, remember."

"Yes, sir."

"His name is Mayne Mountjoy, and after leaving home on account of the duel, he was wont to write his father letters for money from the frontier and have the answers come to an alias, that of Jack Joy, miner, for he was in a mining-camp, and afterward enlisted in the army, but deserted."

"He was enlisted as Maybrick Mountford, and returning to New York City took another alias, that of Joyce Maymount, always you observe, sticking to parts of his real name, a peculiarity that may discover him, as he may again have assumed an alias."

"You are catching on splendidly as a detective, I see, Mr. Vanderlip," observed Nat, with a smile.

"Oh, yes; and I have no doubt but that under your teaching, Nat, I'll be right in it, before long."

"Now your man whom you are to find, is

described as being five feet ten inches, broad-shoulders, slender, with black hair and dark blue eyes, a bronzed complexion, quick in his movements, and with a deep voice."

He carries himself erect, always dressed well, was quick in his movements and could change his voice with great ease, and the expression of his face."

"He was a person of fine education, and of refined tastes, but a spendthrift, a gambler and dissipated, and it will be well to bear these vices in mind, as a man going down hill seldom corrects his bad habits."

"Very true, sir."

"When in New York it was said that he was a great deal with actors, led a Bohemian life and sometimes went on the stage."

"All this is told by his letters to his father, and here are several for you to see his handwriting and style."

"Now, Nat, you have the story of your man, and of his peculiarities, with his name and aliases, and if you can run him to earth there is five thousand dollars in it."

"Mountjoy will return from Europe in a few months, and, for your sake, I hope you will have found the outcast heir here in New York."

"I can but try, sir, and will call my boys together to-night and place the facts before them, so they can start at once upon the case, while I will also make known the Queen's rescue, so that they can pick up any data they may run across in that mysterious affair."

"Yes, I hope they may; but now, put some of your pictures out there to let my man see that I made some purchases, and I will go down and see the Secret Service Chief."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET CALL.

"TELL the butler as you go out, Nat, that you will return this afternoon for your pay, and that I am to be a regular patron, so there will be no need of a different disguise every time you come to see me, though I admit that I am interested in seeing how well you can make up," said Walter Vanderlip as Nat arose to depart, after throwing out some of the pictures from his portfolio."

"Then I must return this afternoon, sir?"

"Yes, as perhaps I can discover something about this man whom Queen Olive rescued, as the chief may know about some one who answers to his description being absent."

New York Nat then took his leave, and wended his way, portfolio in hand, to one of the fashionable hotels on Broadway.

He moved about the rotunda for awhile, until he saw a youth in the uniform of a bell-boy, and going up to him he said in a low tone:

"Flip, there is a special meeting called for to-night, so let the boys on your list know."

"Yes, chief, I will," was the reply of the bell-boy, who was a bright-faced lad with a look of cunning and mischief commingled.

Leaving the hotel New York Nat went to the office of messenger boys, and glancing over a lot of youngsters seated there, motioned to one of them.

Stepping up to the counter he wrote a note, addressed it, and paying the fee for a couple of hours' service for the boy, handed it to the one he had called out, saying simply:

"Take this to its address and get an answer."

"If you are detained, come to my address and get extra pay for time."

The boy's "time" was taken and he darted out of the door, glanced at the envelope and read on it:

"Teaser."

He opened it and read:

"TEASER:—

"Warn your list of boys of a special meeting of the League to-night.

"N. Y. N."

Teaser the messenger boy at once went on his mission, while New York Nat's next call was upon a bootblack stand over which presided a youth as boss, with two assistants.

Nat got into a chair and the boss blacked his boots, and heard also the words:

"Special meeting of the League to-night. Inform your list, Chub."

Chub nodded that he understood, got his nickel and New York Nat took a car for the lower part of town, the bootblack stand being on Union Square.

Going along near the City Hall New York Nat halted at a news-stand to buy a paper.

There was a youth in the stand, and near it half a dozen youngsters calling out the papers they had to sell.

"Paper, sir?" said the youth behind the stand, and whose face was terribly freckled and hair fiery red.

But he was intelligent and shrewd, as any observer could see.

"Yes, Freckles, I wish a copy of each one of the morning dailies. Come to the Den to-night to a special meeting, and bring all of the afternoon papers with you."

"Yes, chief."

"Let your list know of the meeting."

"I'll do it," and, calling to one of the newsboys to keep the stand for him, Freckles went off on his mission, while New York Nat sauntered leisurely on, having informed the four members of the band who each had a list of others to notify of a meeting when it was not held on the regular nights.

New York Nat then strolled down toward the wharves, and halted in a secluded position, whence he could see some boys near a ship that was unloading.

"There are several of my boys there, and they seem to be in some trouble," he muttered.

What the trouble was he did not know, but he could see that the boys were excited, and one of several men who were there was also talking in angry tones.

As he looked, a seaman of one of the ships suddenly seized a ragged little gamin in his hand and struck him a couple of severe blows.

He would have struck him again, when a larger youth of the party sprang forward, and, by a quick act, released the other from his grasp.

The infuriated man, calling for help from other seamen, seemed about to attack the brave boy who so boldly defied him, when, with a bound, New York Nat ran between them and said sternly:

"See here, old sea-dog, you shall not hurt those boys, for I'm in this game."

Laughter and cheers from the on-lookers greeted these bold words of the supposed young artist, and a stern voice from on board the ship called out:

"Avast there, men! Let those boys alone, or you will have me to settle with. I saw your persecution and you must stop it."

It was the ship's captain who spoke, and the men slunk away, the boys too, while New York Nat said in a low tone to one of them:

"Special meeting to-night, Shorty, so be on hand with your mates."

Then he walked quickly away.

CHAPTER X.

THE ALLY OF THE UNKNOWN FERRETS.

THE Chief of the Secret Service Bureau of the great Metropolis of New York, was in his private office reviewing his morning mail, when a card was brought in to him that read:

"WALTER VANDERLIP."

"Show the gentleman in at once," he ordered; and when, a moment after, Walter Vanderlip entered the office whose threshold so many dreaded to cross, he was most cordially received by the chief, who, though stern and merciless to evil-doers, was a most courteous gentleman at all times.

"Ah, Mr. Vanderlip! Always glad to see you; and do you know I think I shall have to make you a member of my force, so I can give you a badge that will always admit you, be a protection to you as well, yes, and enable you at times perhaps to render good service."

"Sit down, please."

Mr. Vanderlip took a seat and said:

"I thank you, chief, and it is just what I was thinking about asking you for, a badge of authority, and to serve without pay, for I see ways in which I can render good service."

"You shall have special badges as an officer, but you will have to be enrolled and draw pay."

"Then permit me to ask you to inform your paymaster to place my pay each month to the use of those of the force who are deserving of charity."

"That is noble of you indeed, Mr. Vanderlip, and the corps will appreciate your generosity."

"I will have you enrolled at once as a special officer with full powers; but I believe you come with valuable information for me as you generally do."

"I have a report to make, sir."

"And from my Unknown Ferrets, whose identity all my plots cannot discover, and who have given me a vast amount of most important information indeed, while they are laying up for themselves a snug fortune in rewards."

"You are not yet ready to tell me, Mr. Vanderlip, where these Secret Shadows are?"

"No, chief, the secret must still remain untold; in fact, it may be said now that I am one of them for all communications and warnings will henceforth be made through me."

"Understand me, chief, I am as ignorant as you are, of just who these Unknown Ferrets are, save two of them, and in honor bound I cannot betray those two, for you know well the service they rendered me?"

"I do, indeed, Mr. Vanderlip, but I cannot but fret under the mystery about them, though I am sure I will, in good time, know all about what I am now in such inky darkness regarding."

"All in good time, chief, I hope will be as clear as noonday; but I saw one of the Dare-Devil Detectives, as you are wont to call them, only an hour ago, and he gave me a piece of information that I decided to at once make you acquainted with."

"I shall be glad to know it, Mr. Vanderlip," said the chief, warmly, and adding:

"Any information I receive through my Unknown Shadows is always of an important nature."

"Can I ask, sir, if there have been any reports made to you of late of persons missing from their homes?"

The chief opened a book and began to read at a date a week back:

"A woman of twenty—"

"No, sir, she is not the one."

"A lad has disappeared from—"

"No, sir, not a lad."

"An old gentleman has—"

Not an old gentleman, chief."

"Well, here is a negro man who has disappeared, a Chinese found murdered and several other minor cases."

"None fit the case in point, sir, for it is a gentleman about thirty, handsomely dressed, with no papers to identify him, and no jewelry or money."

"He was seen afloat upon the Hudson River, lying upon a board, his hands tied,

and a blow upon his head that cut to the bone and had rendered him unconscious."

"He was rescued from death by a young girl who saw him, and brought him ashore, where a gentleman, with a stylish team out for an early drive, saw the rescue and took the unconscious man in his carriage and drove to the nearest physician."

"That means foul play, Mr. Vanderlip."

"On the part of the one who took him in the carriage?"

"Oh, no; his being found afloat and on the river, bound and hurt."

"And I am a trifle suspicious of the one on hand to receive him, sir."

"Ah! I had not thought of that."

"I will at once put detectives on the case. Who was the rescuer and where did it occur, also at what time?"

"The rescuer was a young girl, Miss Herbert I think is the name," innocently said Walter Vanderlip, not caring in any way to connect Olive with the Unknown Ferrets.

"It occurred early this morning, and you will find Miss Herbert, I think, at Widow Herbert's cottage on the Hudson River at One Hundred and — street."

"And where was the person in the carriage?"

"Some blocks above where the landing was made, as the young girl could not pull back against the tide and wind."

"And how did you ascertain the facts, Mr. Vanderlip?"

"Through one of my secret allies, sir, who witnessed the affair."

"Thank you."

"I will send three men out at once on the case, and report by note to you if anything is discovered as to the unfortunate man; but I suppose after all your Dare Devil Detectives will have to be put on the case, as I have noticed that they generally unearth what my ferrets fail to find," said the chief with a smile.

After a stay of ten minutes longer Walter arose and took his departure, returning to his home after dropping into a District Messengers' office and writing a note to Olive, which he dispatched with all haste.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GIRL QUEEN SHADOWER.

OLIVE, the Queen of the Boy Police League, received the note sent by Walter Vanderlip, as soon after it was written as was possible, a liberal fee to the messenger having encouraged him not to let the grass grow under his feet in going to the Widow Herbert's cottage.

The note read simply:

"Have seen N. Y. N., also chief."

"Latter will put men to work on the case, first seeing you, Miss Herbert."

"Nothing told more than incident of rescue and gentleman taking rescued away."

"ALLY."

Half an hour after the reception of this note three men came to Widow Herbert's cottage and asked for Miss Herbert.

"Olive had prepared for them, smoothing her hair down upon her forehead, putting on spectacles, and dressing so as to appear years older than she was."

"Miss Herbert, we have come about that rescue this morning, sent by the Secret Service chief," said one of the detectives, revealing his badge.

"What do you desire of me, may I ask?" coolly inquired the young girl.

"To tell us all you know about it, describe the man rescued, and the carriage, coachman, horses and gentleman who took him away, with the place he was taken from."

"That is easily done," and Olive told her story, and getting into her skiff they rowed to where she had landed.

It was on the shore, near a meadow, the road running a hundred yards away beyond. The carriage had driven from the road down to the shore, and retraced its way as it came.

"Is that all you wish of me, gentlemen?" she asked, when she had described the gentleman in the carriage, the one she had rescued, the coachman, vehicle and horses.

"It is all, thank you, miss."

She got into her skiff and rowed back to the cottage, while the three detectives put their heads together for a consultation.

They must find out who the gentleman was who carried the rescued man away, and to do this they must trace the carriage.

So they started off, dividing at the road.

When night came on they had discovered that many stylish carriages drove that highway, a number had been seen with bay horses, and a coachman in livery, and one gentleman in them alone.

They had been going both ways, from town and toward it.

The physicians within a couple of miles around were called upon and not one of them had been seen regarding a case to suit the one the detectives were shadowing.

So, footsore, weary and having made no discovery, the three detectives when night came returned to make their report.

In the mean while the Girl Queen of the Ferrets had decided upon her return to the cottage, to do a little detective work herself.

She went to a livery stable not far away, and hired a horse and phaeton, and invited Widow Herbert and the children for a drive.

She took great care to change her appearance completely, wearing her hair different, putting on a pretty sun hat and a bright-red jacket, so that if the detectives saw her they would not recognize her as "Miss Herbert" whom they had seen.

Mrs. Herbert's two children were placed upon the little front seat of the phaeton, and Olive, who was a skillful driver, took the road the carriage must have taken in the morning.

A few inquiries convinced her that the carriage had not passed along by a certain point at the early hour she had seen it, and when she came to where it had turned off of the road to go to the shore, she noticed that it had come from up the river, and had returned the same way.

She drove rapidly on then, and half an hour after passed one, then another of the detectives, and the last one called to her and asked a few questions as to whether she knew a gentleman and carriage and horses which he described.

Olive answered frankly, that she did not, and saw that she was not recognized.

As the detectives had discovered nothing in that neighborhood she drove rapidly on, and miles above came upon a party of workmen repairing a bridge.

There she saw, drawn upon one side of the road, a carriage badly smashed and a dead horse, one of his legs being broken.

She at once drew rein, for she recognized the carriage and horse at a glance, and just then up drove a wagon to carry the vehicle home, and men to drag the dead horse away.

She soon learned that there had been a fatal accident there that morning by Mr. Harvey Dunham having had his horses take fright at the bridge and plunge down the ravine.

"One of the horses was kilt, miss," said her informer, "and t'other badly hurt, but worst of all the coachman was picked up dying, and Mr. Dunham is hardly expected to live, so badly was he injured."

"Was there any one else in the carriage?" asked Olive quickly.

"No, miss, only Mr. Dunham and the coachman, that was all."

"Where does Mr. Dunham live?"

"At his home three miles above, miss."

Olive drove rapidly on and at last turned into the Dunham grounds.

It was a handsome estate, and she soon met a gardener, while she saw several vehicles at the door.

"Cleverly questioning the man she learned that the coachman was dead, and the master very badly hurt and unconscious."

She also obtained much information as to who Harvey Dunham was, and though convinced that the carriage and horse were the same she had seen in the morning, she gave a fee to the man that made him talkative, and from his description of the gentleman and coachman she was sure she was right, that she had tracked the right party.

But the gardener could tell her nothing of any one else having been in the carriage, and one thing was certain, that the man she had rescued had been gotten rid of somewhere by Harvey Dunham before he had met with the accident at the bridge.

But where?

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE DARE-DEVILS' DEN.

NEW YORK NAT had returned from downtown by Mr. Vanderlip's home, and the two had had a long talk together, the latter telling him that the Secret Service chief had no account of the man rescued by Olive, save what he had told him.

"We must solve the mystery ourselves, then, sir," said Nat.

"We have a meeting to-night, and I will put the band at once to work on your friend's case, of finding the outcast heir, and we will try and discover who that gentleman is, and where he was taken, while we must get at the bottom facts of who it was who tried to kill him."

"When he left Walter Vanderlip, New York Nat went up to the Herbert cottage to see Olive, and learn if she had heard anything from the gentleman who had taken the wounded man away."

But the cottage was closed, Olive being then out on a shadowing expedition herself.

Nat then went along the river-bank for a short distance, turned into an unfrequented road, and soon found himself in a part of the city which had been left to go to wreck, as there were several estates there that had been deserted, and others were waiting for the spreading city to soon take them in.

There was a large, old-time cemetery there, long since deserted, save by the dead, and with a high wall around it, which, however, there was no need for, as the place was shunned as a plague spot would have been.

Upon one side of the graveyard was one of the old houses referred to, and of which dark stories were told, and the superstitious dwellers near said that it was haunted.

It certainly had had a weird history, and the last dweller there had been an old man known as Miser Max and who had been one night murdered for his gold.

The place was surrounded by large trees, and the undergrowth had completely hidden it from view.

As though the old place had no terrors for him, New York Nat had watched, to see that he was not observed and then leaped lightly over the wall.

He made his way through the weeds and foliage-overgrown yard, and soon came to the old mansion, which was large, rambling and gloomy.

He took from his pocket a key and opening a cellar door entered, closing it behind him.

Apparently perfectly acquainted with the place he soon lighted a small lantern, made his way to an upper floor and then putting out the light went on to the third story.

Opening a door he was greeted by a huge, savage-looking dog, that seemed to be delighted to see him.

The dog was closely muzzled, as though to prevent his barking, for New York Nat at once unmuzzled him and fed him with some meat he had brought on the way to the Herbert cottage.

The room he had entered was furnished, as in fact most of the house was, but with old, timeworn furniture, that had been handsome many years before.

But the room showed that it was occupied, and had been made as comfortable as could be with its gloomy appearance.

All of the shutters were closed tight, and heavy curtains hung over the window, the light coming through a door that opened into an adjoining hall where stairs led to a cupola above.

From here came light and air, and with the door closed at night no light was visible from without.

Throwing off his clothes New York Nat lay down upon the bed to rest and was soon fast asleep, for his detective work caused him to spend many a night out.

The sun was just setting when he awoke, and hastily dressing himself so as to appear no different from any other youth on the street, he muzzled the dog, lighted his lantern and made his way out the way he had come in.

He left the lantern burning in the cellar however, and though he locked the door and placed the key on the twig of a tree not far away.

He went out of the grounds by way of the burying-ground, the dismal, spectral place seeming not to cause him the slightest uneasiness.

Again he went to the cottage of Widow Herbert.

A light shone in the windows now, showing that the family had returned home.

At his ring Olive appeared, and he was invited in to supper, which was ready, and he was told of the long afternoon's ride in the phaeton, and of the accident to Mr. Harvey Dunham and the death of his coachman.

Olive left Mrs. Herbert to talk, saying but little, and then hastened to her room to get ready for the theater, as Nat said he had called to have her go out with him.

When she reappeared she went at once upon the little piazza and he joined her there.

She wore a long circular, and was closely veiled.

Leaving the cottage they went along at a quick pace, until reaching the burying-ground, and seeing no one near they entered it, Olive appearing not to be at all alarmed at her surroundings.

Passing through the graveyard they went to the old mansion, the cellar door was unlocked and left open, and the two went upstairs together, Nat remarking:

"The boys will soon be here, Olive."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET MEETING OF THE FERRETS.

PASSING through the room in which New York Nat had his secret home, and Olive receiving a welcome from the dog, that showed he knew her well, they entered the hall in which there was a large table and number of seats in front of it.

Upon this table stood a large lamp, and there were two chairs drawn up to it.

There were writing materials on the table, and appearances generally indicated that it was the Assembly Rooms of the Boy Police, who met secretly in the grim old mansion which others avoided as the abode of ghosts.

The lamp being lighted New York Nat sat down in one of the chairs, while Olive, removing her veil, revealed that she wore a mask that at a casual glance looked like a human face.

Her hair was worn in a colored net, also, and her hands were gloved, while her circular concealed her form.

"I wish I could appear as I am, Nat, without this mask and all bundled up," she said, almost impatiently, as she dropped into the other chair at the table.

He replied, quietly:

"Don't get impatient, sister, for it is for your good I ask you to do so."

"We have in our band only those whom we have every reason to believe that we can trust, and yet it may not be so."

"I would not have one of them know you as you are, or be able to recognize you if called upon to do so."

"Now you are to them the Girl Queen of the Secret Shadows, and a mystery surrounds you, and masked as you are, you hold a greater power over them."

"Remember, we had one traitor in our midst, and glad am I that Sykes did not know you as you are."

"No, no, still be the Veiled Girl Queen of the Vigilante Shadows, and all will be well."

"You are right, Nat, and I will say no more about it; but do you know what I was doing this afternoon when out driving?"

"I had an idea you went for other purpose than a drive?"

"Yes, I went to discover who it was that carried the man I rescued away."

"You made some discoveries, I'll guarantee?"

"Yes."

"The chief sent three men out on the same errand."

"I saw them, and later met two of them, but I am confident they discovered nothing."

"And you?"

"Found out that the gentleman was a Mr. Harvey Dunham, a wealthy young man living in a handsome house miles up the river."

"What he did with the rescued man I do not know, but after he had left him somewhere, he was returning home when his horses took fright, plunged off of a new bridge men were at work on, killed the coachman, and Mr. Dunham is now lying very badly hurt at his home."

"This is remarkable, Olive."

"I thought so, and wondered if it was a judgment upon him."

"How so?"

"Might he—mind you, this is only a surmise, Nat—have, for some reason been the one to deal that deadly blow and then tie that gentleman and set him adrift?"

"But why?"

"Rivalry, jealousy, hatred or gain are motives for such acts."

"Very true."

"He might have been watching the floating form, saw me bring it ashore, and thus got possession of it, after which he drove to some point on the river and again got rid of it."

"Olive, you have a great big head for plots and fathoming plots, and you may be right; but the coachman?"

"Could have been a well-paid accomplice."

"True, and we must now learn just who Mr. Dunham is, his life, friends, foes and all about him, the motive for committing such a crime and all else."

"Yes, and you know that I told you he recognized the wounded man?"

"True, but our faithful watchman gives the warning, and that means that the boys are coming," and as New York Nat spoke the huge dog went to a door leading into the main hallway and gave a low growl.

"All right, old dog," said Nat, and going to the door he unlocked it as a peculiar tap was heard on the other side.

Half a dozen youths entered together, one of them bearing a lantern.

They doffed their hats and bowed to both Nat and Olive, and went to seats fronting the table.

Soon after others came in, two and three

together, until at last the seats were filled, and Queen, who had been counting them, called out:

"Twenty-two! all present, chief."

The young detective chief cast his eye over the lot, and it was a varied lot of youths that met his gaze.

There were the Bell-boy, Messenger, Boot-black, Newsboy, and the three who had been in the trouble down on the wharf, all of which Nat had seen in the morning in his rounds.

But in addition there were a dozen more, from one ragged little urchin of ten, to a youth over sixteen who looked like a divinity student, and was known as Parson, while near him sat another of his age, who wore gloves and was called "Doc," he having studied medicine.

There were others of all sizes and conditions, New York Nat then having under him a score of young Ferrets, he and Olive making twenty-two.

Feeling that they had been called together for some special reason all were as silent as specters and fixing their eyes upon New York Nat waited for him to speak.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO UNRAVEL STRANGE SECRETS.

THE Boy Police Queen had taken up a pen, when the band were seated, and wrote down in a book the date of the meeting, with the reason for it being called, and that each member was present.

Then she waited to hear more, for she was the secretary and treasurer of the Secret Shadows.

"Boys, I called you together to-night for two reasons," said New York Nat.

"First, there is some work for us to enter upon, with expenses paid, and a reward of five thousand dollars if we are successful."

A low murmur of approbation went the rounds at hearing this, and then New York Nat continued:

"These papers I have here, give the description of a person whom we are to find, a missing heir, and one who does not himself know that there is a fortune in store for him, as he is an outcast and has been so regarded by his kindred."

"Here are photographs of him, the *aliases* he has been known under, his height, an estimate of his weight, and all that can be said to aid us in finding him."

"I will read all to you, so listen carefully, then impress the photographs upon your minds, and next find him."

"We'll do it," said Teaser emphatically, and they all laughed at his determined assertion.

Then New York Nat carefully read the papers describing Mayne Mountjoy and giving the numerous names he had been known under, the boys passing the photographs around among themselves the while, and endeavoring to impress every feature upon their memory.

This matter being disposed of, and there not being a dissenting voice against taking up the case of finding the outcast heir, New York Nat continued:

"The second matter to be considered to-night is one over which hangs a mystery we must clear up."

"A young lady rowing on the Hudson this morning, saw a man floating on a board, and found that he had been the victim of an attempt to murder him," and continuing New York Nat told the story of the rescue, and then of the carrying off of the rescued man by a stranger, who had since been found to be a rich young man by the name of Harvey Dunham.

The accident which had befallen Mr. Dunham and his coachman was made known, and also that he had just disposed of the man he had carried off with him.

Not a word was said about Olive having been the rescuer, as the young Ferrets would very quickly have tracked out the mystery as to who was their Queen.

The part she had played in the rescue was therefore kept as a dead secret by New York Nat.

"It is my wish that you, Doc and Parson, find out for me all you can about this Mr. Dunham, and his past and present life, while you, Keno and Fatty, go on the track of what he did with the rescued man between the time when he drove away from the river with him, and met with the accident at the bridge."

"As for the young lady who rescued her, our Queen will see her upon some excuse and get all the information she can of her rescue, and a description of the man."

"Of course there was an attempt at murder, and from appearances, as the gentleman had nothing about him of value, a robbery."

"But was it an attempt to kill to rob, or for some other purpose is the question."

"Blow, you and Shorty are to take the whole shore in, finding out where there are any large planks upon it, such as the man was found upon, and trying to match the rope, with which he was tied, and which I managed to get possession of."

"Find out just who dwells along the river-banks that would be likely to commit a crime, and search both shores, though, as the wind was more from the New York side, he must have been set adrift from this bank."

The Queen wrote down the names as spoken, and the duties each pair of Ferrets were sent to perform.

Then, as some of the young Shadows, asked for an advance, in case money should be needed to aid them in their work, Queen, as she was generally called by them, opened her treasure-bag and handed out to each one the certain sum named, putting the amount down opposite to their names, for the Secret League of Ferrets was run on business principles, all the boys being under pay, and with a percentage in all rewards obtained, and which, at a specified time, was to be drawn and divided.

The cause for their being called together having been accomplished, the members of the League were individually asked for any reports that they had to make of work done.

Several of them had made discoveries of crimes committed, and of burglaries intended, and these were written down on a slip which New York Nat put in his pocket to hand to Walter Vanderlip, to take to the chief of police.

Then, two by two the Ferrets stole out of the old mansion, Nat and Olive following, and when the young girl had been escorted to her home, the young captain of the Boy Police returned to his own lonely abiding-place in the Haunted House, his only companion being the huge dog that kept watch for him, and looked savage enough to frighten a ghost even.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN OF THE OUTCAST.

WAVELANDS was one of the finest estates in Maryland, and situated near a pretty village on one of the broad tributaries of the Chesapeake.

The early morning steamboat from Baltimore, touching at the village, put off there one day a gentleman, who, grip in hand, as though familiar with the spot, at once went up to the pretty little hotel fronting the water.

As he entered the office he was recognized by the landlord, who extended him a welcome and said:

"We never expected to see you again, Mr. Mountjoy."

"And why, Host Barclay?"

"Well, sir, we knew that you left here long ago, and never hearing from you, we supposed you were dead; in fact that has been the belief here for years."

"No, Mr. Barclay, I am a hard one to kill, and like a bad penny turn up when least expected."

"Yes, sir, you are a hard one to kill, as Mr. Wilton found out long ago, and—"

"We'll not discuss that affair, Host Barclay, or any of my wild deeds of the past if you please, for I have spent much time of late in endeavoring to forget by-gones, and have tried to become a respectable citizen, so as to redeem myself in the eyes of my old friends."

"You was not so very bad, sir, as I remember you; only a trifle wild, and would go it a little stiff sometimes, to your poor old father's great sorrow; but he had bad advisers, sir, and I fear has cut you off without anything, especially as he also believed you dead."

The gentleman turned quickly upon the landlord, throwing down the pen he had taken up to write his name in the register, and grasping the arm of Mr. Barclay cried earnestly:

"You speak of my father having left me nothing!"

"My God! is he dead?"

"Oh, sir, I supposed that you knew all about it?"

"No, I know nothing."

"I left this place fourteen years ago, and have been on the frontier and abroad ever since."

"Is my father dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did he die?"

"Three years ago, Mayne," said the landlord in a kindly tone.

Mayne Mountjoy dropped his head in his hands and thus remained for a moment.

Then he said, and his voice quivered:

"It is a cruel blow to me, Mr. Barclay, for I was wild I admit, and my father, in his anger, drove me from his home."

"I went away with a cloud upon me, with the life of Mark Wilton upon my hands, and many looked upon me as one who had taken the high road to perdition."

"I have not heard from my home for long years, and the last I did hear was that I was regarded as an outcast."

"But I went to work, I have not done badly, and with a fair little fortune earned by my own exertions, I came back to ask my father to forget and forgive, to do as he pleased with his fortune, only to let me once more dwell in the old home."

"And now you tell me that he is dead?"

"He is, sir," and the good-hearted landlord wiped away a tear of sympathy.

"And was I forgiven?"

"That I do not know, sir; but, as I said, he supposed you were dead, and his nephew, whom he adopted as a son, became his heir."

"He is welcome to all; but I must go up and see him, and learn of my father's death and forgiveness."

"Mr. Keene Mountjoy is not at home now, sir."

"Where is he?"

"He left here ten days ago, sir, to go abroad for half a year, he said, his wife being dead, and his daughter at boarding-school at Baltimore."

"My cousin was married then?"

"Yes, sir, he married—well, sir, the young lady you had the trouble with Mark Wilton about."

Mayne Mountjoy started at this, took a quick stride across the office and back, and then said:

"And she is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they had one child?"

"Yes, sir, Miss Ethel, named after her brother."

"She is now, as I said, at boarding-school, and she is a little beauty."

"And what of my cousin, whom my father left his heir?"

"He is a handsome man, young yet, for he's not over thirty-five, I take it, and there is not a more popular man in the State; in fact he has not an enemy, I believe."

"Well, I am sorry he is not here; but as I came back for awhile, I shall make my home with you, for I recall what a good host you were in the past, when many a time I had to stop with you, not daring to go home—By the way, when I left I owed you a little something, did I not?"

"Yes, sir, but I never spoke of it, as it was only a matter of seventy dollars."

"Well, it has been due for fourteen years, and drawing six per cent. interest—here is the amount, Host Barclay, just one hundred and twenty-eight dollars and eighty cents," said Mayne Mountjoy, after a rapid mental calculation of the fourteen years' interest.

"Oh, Mr. Mountjoy, I could hardly expect this, sir, and—"

"Say no more about it, landlord, for there is your money, so give me a receipt," and taking a well-filled wallet from his pocket he laid the money on the office-desk and continued:

"Now give me the best room you have, and I will need the use of a horse and buggy while here—oh! my poor father, it is sad to think of him as gone and unforgiving," and Mayne Mountjoy went off to his room, his sorrowful face winning the deepest sympathy from the landlord, who now spread the news about the village of the outcast heir's return.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

News of any kind travels fast in a country village, and it was not very long before the whole neighborhood about Wavelands knew that Mayne Mountjoy, the outcast heir, had returned, and was stopping at the Seashore Inn.

Landlord Barclay had told the story a score of times to different ones, how greatly shocked Mayne Mountjoy had been to know of his father's death, how he started, turned pale and while tears came into his eyes, bitterly repented of his past.

Then, too, it was repeated, and embellished, how the returned outcast had made a fortune in the mines out on the frontier, had then spent years in traveling in foreign lands, and had at last come back to his old home with a well-filled purse.

The bill he had paid, with interest, had been added to until it got up into the thousands, and the sorrow of the outcast, when he heard how his old sweetheart, Ethel Alden, was dead, was depicted by the gossips with great earnestness.

Mark Wilton, whom he had regarded as a rival, and had killed in a duel, had been but a short while a resident of that part of the country, so had no kindred and few friends there, and there was nothing to dread from these.

As soon as he had had breakfast the outcast heir had driven off somewhere, the landlord said, and news came in that he had been seen driving into the grand gateway leading to the Wavelands estate.

Later, a lady driving out to the village graveyard, had surprised him standing by his father's tomb, for a marble shaft had been erected over his adopted father by Keene Mountjoy the heir.

Not thirty paces away was the grave of the woman he had loved, and taken life for, and a few paces in another direction was buried Mark Wilton.

Seeing her, the lady said, he had quickly left the burying-ground, but she had gone the rounds and found upon the tombs of old Mrs. Mountjoy and Ethel Mountjoy, as well

as upon the grass-grown grave of Mark Wilton, large bunches of flowers, which it afterward was discovered the outcast heir had gotten from the gardener at Wavelands, paying him a handsome price for them, for, being a new man, Mayne Mountjoy was unknown to him.

These stories regarding Mayne Mountjoy won for him the sympathy of the entire community, especially his placing flowers upon the grave of Mark Wilton his old enemy, as it showed he held no enmity in his heart any longer.

Returning to a late dinner at the inn, Mayne Mountjoy found the cards of a number of persons who were willing to forget and overlook his past, and had called upon him.

"I heard only the kindest words for you, Mr. Mountjoy!" said Landlord Barclay, as he ushered him in to a most tempting dinner.

"My friends are all very kind; but I do not care to visit anywhere now, as after a short stay, I will return when my Cousin Keene returns home."

Telling the landlord, after spending a week at the inn, where to address any mail coming for him, the outcast heir took the steamer for Baltimore, saying he would return when his cousin got back from England.

It was several weeks after his departure that Mayne Mountjoy received one day a telegram that read:

"You are wanted at Wavelands. Some accident has befallen your cousin. I wire by request of attorney."

"LANDLORD BARCLAY."

The first steamer leaving for the village carried Mayne Mountjoy as a passenger, and when he landed the following morning at the village he was met on the wharf by the landlord and a lawyer who had been his father's attorney he remembered.

Going up to the inn the outcast heir was told that news had come from New York the day before of the most mysterious disappearance of Keene Mountjoy, who had gone to take the steamer for Liverpool.

He had engaged his state-room, gone on board during the day and put his baggage in it, and then had left the steamer saying he would return by midnight, as it sailed on the early tide.

He had been missed after the steamer sailed, and had been supposed to have gotten left.

Arriving, on the other side, it was expected by the steamer officers that he would arrive by the next ship of that line.

But such was not the case, and on her way back the steamer had met another of the same line and signaled to know if Mr. Keene was on board.

No such person had taken passage on that vessel was the response.

Returning to New York the captain had at once reported the affair to the agents, who in turn had made it known to the chief of police.

At once the officers of the Secret Service were sent out to find some trace of the missing man, and by wiring to his home, as the steamer's register showed, it was discovered that he had an attorney in New York by the name of Gray Norris, who collected certain rents due from property in that city.

Mr. Norris was found and quickly made his report, to the effect that Mr. Mountjoy had left his home at eleven P. M. to go at once on board of the steamer, and had come and departed in a hack.

He at once suggested that the nearest kinsman of Mr. Keene Mountjoy be made acquainted with his strange disappearance, and added that he would see to it that a large force of detectives would be at once placed upon the case to discover what had become of the missing man.

Upon this reply from Lawyer Norris, the Wavelands attorney at once decided to communicate with Mayne Mountjoy, and going to see Landlord Barclay the two talked it over and he was telegraphed for.

In the hotel the three held a long consultation upon the matter, and the attorney said:

"Your duty is plain, Mr. Mountjoy, for, if your cousin does not appear, and has been killed, you are the heir direct in law, so my advice is that you go to Baltimore, break the news gently to Ethel of her father's disappearance, and then start for New York and be on the scene yourself."

"I will go," was the reply of the outcast heir.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MISSING MAN.

MR. MAYNE MOUNTJOY took the advice of the Wavelands attorney, returning to Baltimore to see the little daughter of his cousin, and break to her the news of her father's strange disappearance.

She was a beautiful young girl just entering her teens, and having heard her father speak of his cousin Mayne, and never unkindly, she received him pleasantly and found him a deep sympathizer with her in her grief.

Of course, young as she was, she had heard, when at home, of the fatal duel Mayne Mountjoy had fought with Mark Wilton on account of her mother, and often had seen the grave of the dead man who had then lost his life.

She had heard also of her father's cousin having been a wild young man.

But he was so handsome, so gentle toward her, his voice was so low and pleasant, and his sympathy so great that she was at once drawn toward him.

"I will do all in my power, Ethel, to find your dear father, and will write you daily of our progress, and wire you if I get any favorable news."

"But, my child, if it should be that we cannot, remember that I have come back in time to take his place as far as I can, and you will find in me a father, one who will do all in my power to make you happy."

"Now remember, Ethel, I am to be your Uncle Mayne."

She put her arms up, drew his face toward her and kissed him, and thus they parted.

Soon after he was on his way to New York and wired Lawyer Gray Norris to meet him at his hotel.

Arriving there the lawyer's card was almost immediately brought up, and with it that bearing the name:

"WALTER VANDERLIP,

"Arizona."

In one corner of the latter card was the address of Walter Vanderlip's New York home.

Lawyer Gray Norris was an elderly man of dignified mien, and introducing himself presented Mr. Vanderlip as a very old friend of Mr. Mayne Mountjoy, and one who had been one of the last to see him on the night of his mysterious disappearance.

Then the lawyer added:

"When I was informed of my client's strange disappearance, I at once wired to his home for his nearest kindred to come on and consult about the matter, and was glad to get your dispatch."

"Knowing that he had called on Mr. Vanderlip here, whom he referred to as an old and valued friend, and whose address he gave me, I went to see him and heard that he had left his home to come to mine, taking a cab near Forty-second street."

"There Mr. Vanderlip left him, and he drove up to my home, remained an hour or more, and then took his leave in the cab that

was waiting for him, and of course I supposed he had caught the steamer."

"I paid to your cousin a large sum of money, for the rent of property he owns here, and he was otherwise well supplied, I noticed, besides wearing a handsome ring, diamond stud and sleeve-buttons, with a watch and chain."

"He had also some important papers with him."

"That is all I can tell you, sir, except that so far we have been unable to find the slightest trace of him, or of his fate, but I very much fear he has been foully dealt with."

"It certainly appears so to me," said Mayne Mountjoy sadly, and then he went on to speak of his having lately returned from the West, where he had amassed quite a little fortune, and had gone to see his father, who had, on account of his wild escapades as a youth, and an unfortunate affair he had been an actor in, exiled him from his home and regard.

Having sown his wild oats he had returned to see his father, to learn of his death, and the changes that had taken place during his long absence.

He had also learned that his father had adopted his cousin, as his son and heir, and left him his fortune, but that was a matter he cared nothing for, as he had ample means to take care of himself.

"But, my dear sir, you are the direct heir, the heir in-law, whether your cousin be dead or alive, and you of course could claim your own; but I trust you will find your relative and an amicable settlement be arranged between you," said Lawyer Norris.

"Permit me to state what I know of this matter," said Walter Vanderlip.

"Your cousin came to me and told me that he had been left your father's heir *in toto*."

"He said that he felt that you yet lived and his conscience dictated that he should look you up and share the fortune equally with you."

"What! did Keene Mountjoy say this?" asked Mayne Mountjoy, with deep emotion.

"Yes, and more, for he came to New York on his way to find you, having last heard of you in Paris."

"That he might leave no stone unturned to find you, he went to a detective agency in this city and placed the matter in the hands of the chief to have you looked up in New York, giving all the data he could regarding you."

"Now, sir, you see that he was anxious to find you, and share the fortune with you, and should he not be found, as Mr. Norris says, you are the heir; but, for Heaven's sake let us use every means to find him, for I am a man of means and will give liberally to have the most thorough search made."

"There is no need of that, Mr. Vanderlip, for it is my duty and pleasure, for, as I said, I am well off, and shall place in Mr. Norris's hand a reward of ten thousand dollars for the finding of my cousin, dead or alive, and any plan you gentlemen may suggest I will gladly enter into, for his fate, one way or the other, must be known, and if he has been killed then his murderers must suffer the full penalty of the law, so call upon me, gentlemen, and command me as you please," said Mayne Mountjoy, emphatically.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HEIR DIRECT.

"WITH such a man to aid us, Mr. Vanderlip, success is assured," said Lawyer Norris, as he left the hotel with Walter Vanderlip.

"Yes, and I am glad to have met Mr. Mayne Mountjoy and heard his story before I told mine."

"I like the man, and I cannot but doubt a

certain story I heard regarding him, and think there must have been a mistake, a case of mistaken identity, in fact."

"Yes, I am glad that he has turned up in time to give us his aid, and instead of being a poor man, he is rich, I take it from what he said."

"There appears to be no doubt of that; but you will call for him, as agreed, and take him to see the Secret Service chief?"

"Yes, I will go this afternoon with him."

And just at three o'clock a carriage drove up to the Secret Service Headquarters and Walter Vanderlip and Mayne Mountjoy got out and went into the chief's room.

Walter Vanderlip presented Mr. Mountjoy, and the chief heard his story, and then said:

"The whole affair seems to be wrapped in blankest mystery, for my men can get no clue."

"Even the Secret Service shadowers you know of, Mr. Vanderlip, have not given you any information on the case, I believe?"

"Nothing yet very tangible, chief, but I am hoping for news daily."

"As I am."

"My men have been on the case, and some are inclined to believe that Mr. Mountjoy did go aboard the steamer, perhaps after drinking more than was good for him, and fell overboard."

"He was a very temperate man, I learned by those who knew him well about his home, sir, and besides, Mr. Vanderlip says that the steamer's men assert that he did not go on board."

"True, Mr. Mountjoy, but he may have fallen off the dock."

"Would his body not have been found, sir?"

"Very likely, I must admit, unless carried at once out to sea on the tide."

"Has the cabman not been found that drove him to Lawyer Norris's?"

"No one has been found who says that he had a call upon that night to go to the lawyer's address."

"And I took no notice of the cab, horse or man, though I saw him take the vehicle and drive away," said Walter Vanderlip.

"It certainly is a most mysterious affair, and I cannot believe that my cousin could have taken his own life."

"All who knew him intimately assert that he appeared to be happy, the fortune left by my father was increasing rapidly under his care, his home was an elegant one, with every luxury at command, and he idolized his beautiful young daughter."

"No, he has been done away with for the money and valuables he had with him, and I fear he will never be found alive; in fact it is very doubtful even if his body will be discovered, for those wretches did their work well."

"I say wretches, as my cousin is said to have been a man of fine physique, and possessed of great strength, so one man could hardly handle him."

"My idea is that the cabman suspected he had a prize, and with some confederate, plotted to rob him, and, being resisted, killed him."

"Find the cabman and you will discover the murderer of my poor brother, chief."

This theory seemed to now impress the chief and Walter Vanderlip more strongly as the right one, and it was decided that every effort should at once be made to find the man who had driven Keene Mountjoy to the home of Lawyer Norris.

"I shall remain in the city for a couple of weeks, chief, and remember, let no fear of expense stand in the way of finding my cousin's murderer, for I will pay any demands and a large reward most liberally."

"In a couple of weeks my brother's daughter leaves her school for her vacation, and I wish to go and take her to her home, poor child, and cheer her up all in my power, for

she will miss her father sadly in that grand old home.

"But a telegram will bring me on at any time to consult with you upon the matter, should no clew be found before my departure."

The chief promised to communicate daily with Mayne Mountjoy through Walter Vanderlip, and seemed most favorably impressed with the brother of the missing man.

Then the two took their departure, Mr. Mountjoy going to Walter Vanderlip's to have dinner with him.

After dinner, at which Walter Vanderlip found his new friend a most entertaining companion, the two talked until late about the missing man, and his little daughter, and the future of the child.

"I, knowing the intention of your cousin regarding you, and that you are the heir direct, would urge, Mr. Mountjoy, that you go to your old home and take possession, trying to replace to little Ethel as far as you can her father," said Walter Vanderlip, and Mayne Mountjoy responded:

"Yes, I suppose it would be the right thing for me to do."

CHAPTER XIX.

NEW YORK NAT HAS A CLUE.

It was a sore disappointment for New York Nat and his Boy Shadowers to be called off from the hunt for the outcast heir of Wavelands, when it became known that he had suddenly turned up about the time his cousin had disappeared.

Of course they were at once put on the case of the missing man, with the promise of a reward if they found him, or if dead, discovered his murderers.

With this incentive another special meeting was held and the Boy Police set out upon the new track, the finding of Keene Mountjoy dead or alive, and if the former, the cause of his death, and if murdered, to discover his murderers.

They began work with a will; but somehow did not make rapid progress, and when day after day they compared notes, they had very little to report.

They seemed to have gotten into a run of ill luck, as very often happens, and it clung to them persistently.

They had failed signally in their hunt for the man who had been rescued from the river and driven off by Harvey Dunham in his carriage.

His coachman was in his grave, so his lips were forever sealed, and not a soul could tell where the vehicle had gone after leaving the river.

Harvey Dunham still lay desperately ill with brain fever, and the chances were against his recovery, so nothing could be found out from him, at least until he became well enough to be questioned upon the subject.

Those who had been questioned at his home said that he had been out until after midnight the night before his accident, and returning home in his dog-cart with his coachman, at dawn had started out again, this time in his carriage, and this was, in the eyes of the Boy Shadowers, a suspicious circumstance, something to militate against both him and his coachman.

But more could not be learned, and it was certain that if Harvey Dunham had carried the wounded man to any physician's house, or private residence, on his way from the river, it would have been discovered.

Except the Boy Shadowers, and the chief and his detectives, no one seemed to know of Harvey Dunham having driven off with the unconscious man.

All the papers had been searched for the finding of a body, or the loss of any one answering the description of the one who had been rescued from the river.

But in vain the search, and the chief's detectives had been forced to surrender, and

admit that they were mystified and could find no clue.

The coming on to New York of Mayne Mountjoy, the outcast heir who had found himself, so to speak, added renewed vigor to the search of both the regular detective force, and the Unknown Shadowers whose ally Walter Vanderlip was.

He had told the Boy Police, through their young chief, New York Nat, that there was a reward offered by the outcast heir of ten thousand dollars for proof that Keene Mountjoy was dead or alive, and they had set to work with a will upon this new mystery, the disappearance of the master of a large estate, upon the very night he was to have sailed for Liverpool in search of the man who now offered a reward for him just double what his, Keene Mountjoy's, offer had been for the finding of his cousin, whom he wished to bring back into the fold and make co-heir with himself of the Wavelands estate.

After a week spent in New York, in a fruitless search for some clue as to what had become of his missing cousin, Mayne Mountjoy left for Baltimore, telling the chief of the Secret Service and Walter Vanderlip that he should take Ethel Mountjoy to Wavelands, and make it his abiding-place, to try and cheer the young girl up in her suspense regarding her father, but should he be wanted, to at once telegraph for him and he would come on.

He had not been gone but a few days when the supposed young artist called again upon Walter Vanderlip.

The butler had begun to know him now as one who always had a fee for him, and he was at once admitted to the library, where, as was his wont after breakfast, Mr. Vanderlip enjoyed his cigar and looked over his mail and papers.

"Well, Nat, glad to see you."

"Sit down and tell me if there is anything new, for everything in the Secret Service among the Unknown Ferrets seems to be at a standstill now."

"Yes, sir, it does seem so, for my boys have discovered nothing, nor has Olive, with all her brightness, managed to bit upon anything of importance in the way of a clue."

"And you, Nat? for I believe you have something to tell of importance."

"I have a clue, sir, that is all," was the reply.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOY FERRETS' CAPTAIN HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

"I FELT that you would hit upon something, Nat, where all others failed, and I have had strong faith in you throughout," said Walter Vanderlip when New York Nat had said that he had only a clue.

"Yes, sir, the case has been worrying me, for everything seemed to work against me."

"I cannot tell you all I have done, or what suspicions I have had, but I will do so in good time if I find I am on the right track."

"All right, Nat, take your own way to go about it and I am content."

"But what is this clue you have?"

"I'll let you see if there is any thing in it to your mind, and I wonder it has never been thought of before and considered."

"Out with it, Nat."

"You know the date when Mr. Mountjoy called on you?"

"Yes."

"Please give it to me, sir."

Walter Vanderlip did so.

"Now, sir, do you recall that it was upon the very next day, just seven weeks ago, that Olive rescued the gentleman from the Hudson River?"

Walter Vanderlip sprang to his feet and cried:

"Nat, you are on the right track I am certain."

"How strange that none of us ever thought of that before."

"I must let the chief know of this at once."

"No, sir, please do not, at least for awhile."

"When did it occur to you?"

"Several weeks ago, sir."

"Yes, I begin to feel now that the man rescued by Olive was my poor friend, and now it appears there can be no hope that he is alive."

"I will not be so sure of that, sir, for he may be, yet kept in hiding, and he may be dead."

"Have you a photograph of Mr. Mountjoy?"

"One taken some years ago, but not lately."

"Can I see it, sir, or rather will you lend it to me?"

"Certainly."

Walter Vanderlip went to a photograph album and turned the leaves over.

"Strange, it is not here."

"Could I have given it to the chief, Nat?"

"I do not know, sir; but I should think you would remember."

"I do, and I have not done so."

"The photograph was here before the visit of Mountjoy to me, for then I saw it last, and he promised to send me a recent one."

"But it has been taken out of the album."

"Now, Mr. Vanderlip, I wish to say I am going away for a few days."

"Where are you going, Nat, or is it a secret?"

"To all save you and Olive it is a secret, sir."

"I will keep it faithfully."

"I am going to Wavelands, sir."

"Ah! the home of Keene Mountjoy?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"Well, sir, to have a look at the place, talk with people who knew Mr. Mountjoy, and get a few ideas that I may act upon."

"See here, Nat?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are not telling me all you know, or suspect about this matter?"

"No, sir, for I wish, as I said, to be on the safe side; but I have not been idle, and I have made a few discoveries."

"Will you tell me anything of them?"

"I will tell you, sir, that I found the hackman who drove Mr. Mountjoy up to Lawyer Norris's and back."

"Hah! you have discovered that, and the chief's best men have been unable to do so?"

"Yes, sir, but perhaps they did not go about it as I did."

"How was that?"

"Well, sir, I went to every house on every street, the hack would take in leaving the lawyer's, and asked the people if they had seen a cab, or known of one passing at night on that date."

"At last I found an Irishman who told me he had gone to a drug-store for medicine for a sick child, and had seen a cab break down not far from his shanty."

"Break down?"

"Yes, sir, the wheel came off, he said, and the driver was thrown off, but not hurt, and a gentleman got out."

"He was in a great hurry to get the medicine, but was going to see if he could be of assistance, when he saw a man run up, and so he went on."

"When he returned the hackman was there and said he was waiting for help, as the man who guided the gentleman to the stable, said he would send aid to him."

"The Irishman went home with his medicine, and then, as he saw the cab still there, found an axle-nut among some pieces of iron he had and took it to the cabman who put on his wheel and drove away."

"This is certainly evidence that the hackman was not the murderer, Nat, of Mr. Mountjoy."

"He is not guilty, sir, for I have seen him and had a talk with him."

"Ah, Nat, how did you accomplish that?" said Walter Vanderlip with interest.

"Well, sir, Mr. Mountjoy took a cab at Forty-second street and Broadway."

"Yes."

"I asked the Irishman to describe the cab, horse and man."

"He did so, and so I began to hang about the Forty-second street neighborhood, looking at the different cabs, horses and drivers."

"I disguised myself so as to look like an Irish lad, and at last picked out my man and going up to him asked if he got home all right, the night his wheel ran off."

"Oh, yes; but how did you know about it?" he said.

"I told him I was the Irishman's son, and after questioning him for awhile I found that while waiting for Mr. Mountjoy a man had come along half drunk and invited him to drink, and he believes the fellow removed the nut from the axle when he went to sleep, having taken too much to drink."

"Well, Nat, you deserve the name your boys give you, Wizard Shadower," said Walter Vanderlip, admiringly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "WIZARD" AT WORK.

NAT seemed pleased at the praise bestowed upon him by Walter Vanderlip and modestly replied:

"When I get a clue, sir, I stick to it for all there is in it."

"You certainly do; but your cabman did not suspect why you were questioning him?"

"No, indeed, sir, and as the search for the cabman has been a secret one he did not have the remotest idea that anything was wrong."

"Pretending to believe that the man who gave him liquor meant to rob him and his passenger, I asked him to describe him, which he did."

"I then asked him about the man who had come to his aid, and went off with the gentleman, but he said in his excitement he had not noticed whether he was the same one or not who had given him the liquor."

"Then I went to see the Irishman again and asked him about the man he had seen run up to the cab."

"And his answer?"

"That he was not sure, but he looked like an artist who lived in an old mansion near the river that was going to ruin, and which other people avoided."

"If he was the same one he had led the stranger in the direction of his home."

"An artist, you said?"

"Yes, sir, so the Irishman told me, and he said he was a good one, too, though people regarded him as a crank."

"He had plenty of paintings, and lived well, but dressed often in very seedy clothing, while at times he had seen him well dressed and hardly to be taken for the same man."

"No one knew who he was or his past history, and there seemed a mystery hanging about him, for he would never talk of himself, but he had many Indian trophies, weapons and other things, a uniform and much else that led the people to think he had spent much time on the frontier and also been an artist."

"Did you learn his name?"

"The Irishman said he was known as Mark; that is all they ever heard him called."

"Well, I suppose you went to see the artist, Nat?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what kind of a man is he, one to be guilty of a murder?"

"I did not see him, for he had gone away."

"Ah! that looks bad for him."

"I asked about him of his nearest neighbors, and they gave him a good character generally, and said he rented the rooms he occupied in the old house, and, often went away on trips for weeks at a time, telling them that he was sketching in the country and on the sea-shore."

"He told them before leaving the last time, that he was going off on one of his sketching trips, and upon his door was a notice that he was gone away for a month or six weeks."

"Was there a name to it?"

"No, sir, only the letters 'M. M.'"

"It is a pity you did not see him, and I fear he has left for good, and that he may be the one who can account for the disappearance of Keene Mountjoy."

"Perhaps so, sir; but I'll know whether he has gone for good to-night."

"How is that?"

"I shall enter the old house to-night, sir, and with my skeleton keys go into his rooms and have a look at them."

"You must not go alone, Nat."

"I do not fear to do so, sir."

"I had better go with you."

"I think, Mr. Vanderlip, that you being seen in the neighborhood might attract attention, while I can slip along unnoticed, and can do better alone, and there is nothing to fear."

"Well, you know best, and I shall be most anxious to hear your report in the morning."

"I have had a look at the old home and its surroundings, and one of the shanty-dwellers near told me that there was a fine-looking gentleman visiting the place some time ago and asking for Artist Mark, and seemed greatly disappointed when he was told he was away."

"And when do you start for Wavelands, Nat?"

"I shall go to-morrow afternoon, sir, taking the train for Baltimore, and the boat down to-morrow night, for I learn that is the way to get there."

"Will you be gone long?"

"Not many days, sir," and New York Nat took his leave, promising to come by and report the result of his visit to the artist's home.

Just at ten o'clock that night two forms, clad like gamins from the street, landed from a skiff not far from the old mansion where the artist dwelt, and crept cautiously along as though not wishing to attract attention.

They avoided being seen by the dwellers of the shanties near, by hiding among the rocks when any one passed, and reached the old home successfully without having been observed.

"Well, Olive, we are here, and now to get in and see what discovery we can make," said one, and the answer came in a low tone:

"Here are the skeleton keys, Nat."

The Wizard and the Ferret Queen were at secret work.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MIDNIGHT RAIDERS.

TAKING the bunch of skeleton keys from his sister's hand, New York Nat soon found one that opened the front door of the mansion, and the two entered.

They closed the door behind them and after a short search they found a key to open the door on the right, for New York Nat had noticed that on that side the shutters were all tightly closed.

As they entered the room, Queen slid back the slide of a bull's eye lantern and they saw that they were in a large room, with a door open between that and the one adjoining.

All the windows of both rooms were heavily curtained, as though to prevent light from shining through crevices and being seen from without.

But the rooms surprised both Nat and his sister, for one was used as a studio, it seemed, and was not uncomfortably furnished, the other being bed-room, dining room and kitchen combined.

The paintings on the walls, clothing, foils, a number of Indian trophies and other things, indicated something of the character and liking of the lonely occupant of the room, while the sketchings, easel and really clever works of the artist showed that he was a man of refined taste and talent.

The cupboard was well filled with provisions, showing that the artist did not want for food, and having taken a casual glance over the two rooms, New York Nat and the Queen began to make a thorough search of the premises.

They worked together and systematically, and nothing escaped their keen eyes.

The paintings were looked over, the sketches in a large portfolio examined, a number of photographs carefully scanned, and some of them quietly slipped into a bag that Queen carried.

Then the sharp eyes of New York Nat caught sight of something upon the floor that riveted his gaze.

He bent over it, turned the bull's-eye lantern full upon it and said in a low tone:

"This is a pool of blood, Olive!"

"It looks so, though it has dried up."

"There is no doubt of it. How careless a murderer often is, for see, there are spots leading toward the door. Come into the hall."

They went, and there was a spot seen here and there to the front door.

"We must look in this house for Mr. Mountjoy's body, Nat, that is certain."

"No, Olive. You forget you rescued a gentleman from the river, and it is my belief that it was Mr. Mountjoy."

"Ah, yes; but these blood-spots?"

"This house stands on the way from where that cab broke down to the river, where those boards are piled up."

"Now Mr. Mountjoy was a stranger in New York, and he went off with a man who was to guide him to a car."

"They came in this direction, the cabman told me, and the guide was beyond doubt the artist who lives here."

"He caught Mr. Mountjoy unaware, struck him a terrible blow, brought him here and robbed him."

"Then he took his body to the river, and his heart failing him he could not strike another blow, so he bound his hands and set him afloat on one of those planks, for we noticed one large one had been taken from the pile on the river-bank."

"Nat, you read signs as though you were reading from a book."

"You are certainly right about this," Queen said, admiringly.

"I believe I am; but I shall soon know."

"Now to see what else we can find."

They continued their search with the same thoroughness as before, and with caution that nothing should have the appearance of having been disturbed.

After both rooms had been gone over twice, taking several hours in the search, Nat went to the chimney and threw the light of the bull's-eye lantern up it.

"Here, Sis, hold the lantern just so."

She obeyed, and facing his way, regardless of the soot, up the chimney, he found on one side an opening in the chimney, just above his head.

Thrusting his hand into it he felt a box and drew it out.

It was a tin box, a foot long and six inches wide, while it was locked.

One of the skeleton keys soon opened it, and within was a dueling-pistol, with some

engraving upon it, a bundle of letters, a lady's ring, a gold watch and chain, diamond stud, diamond sleeve-buttons and a seal ring, with a morocco case containing some papers.

New York Nat looked all over carefully, put them back in the box, and handed it to Olive with the remark:

"Put this in your bag and you keep it, Sis.

"We must get out now and return home; but I wish you to see one of the boys to-morrow, call a special meeting for to-morrow night, and tell them we are on the right track, and three of them must watch this old mansion day and night, and, if the artist returns he must be shadowed and not be allowed to escape.

"I am going away, as you know, and you will have to see to it that the boys catch this man if he returns, for he it is who murdered Mr. Keene Mountjoy beyond all doubt, as we have the proof right in this box and those blood-spots on the floor.

"What money he got he took with him, and yet he intends to return, that is certain, from all we find here."

Having left everything as they found it, save the tin box and the photographs, they put out their lanterns, left the rooms and the mansion, and going back to their skiff pulled rapidly back to the Herbert cottage.

There New York Nat left his sister, and going to his room in Miser Max's Haunted House, he was soon sleeping soundly, for there was work for him to do when he awoke.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YOUNG ARTIST.

WAVELANDS, for generations the home of the Mountjoys, was situated upon a rise of land covered with majestic trees, and commanding an extensive view of the country and water scenery about it for many miles.

The house was a large one, with broad piazzas, massive chimneys, and ornamented grounds surrounded it, with a small village half a mile away, which in *ante bellum* days was the home of the slaves.

Several thousand acres of fields, meadows, orchards and woodlands were within view from the piazzas, and all had the air of being the home of refinement and wealth.

With all prosperous without, within doors there was an air of luxury upon all.

Far away to the northward was visible the spires of the little village where the steamer landed, and along the road leading from it to Wavelands, a youth was walking one afternoon, his destination evidently being the fine old mansion.

He had a large portfolio slung at his back, wore spectacles, dressed fairly well, and his head was covered by a slouch hat.

He did not seem to dread the dogs that came toward him as he entered the yard about the mansion, and walked straight on while a young girl came flying down the steps and called out:

"Oh, I was so frightened for the dogs are vicious, and no one ever comes on foot."

"But you do not seem to mind dogs."

"Oh, no, they seldom are cross toward me after I speak to them, miss; but is this Wavelands?"

"Yes. Will you come in?"

"I wish to ask Mr. Mountjoy's permission to make some sketches, if he don't mind."

The girl's face reddened, and she replied: "My uncle is away this afternoon, but I suppose would not object, for I am sure my poor papa would not."

"Your father is not here then, miss?"

"Oh, no, we do not know where he is, for he disappeared most mysteriously in New York two months ago; but my Uncle Mayne lives here with me now, and he is the owner if papa is dead."

"I am sorry," and the youth gazed upon the lovely face of the young girl with undisguised admiration.

"Could you not let me make the sketches, miss, or have you a portrait you would like painted; in fact I would like to make one of you."

"I would not dare give you permission without uncle's consent, but I should like to have one very much."

"Perhaps you would like one of your father?"

"Oh, so much!" she said, eagerly.

"Well, if you will give me a good photograph of him, I will make a portrait of him from it and send it to you."

"My uncle is an artist, too, and he promised to paint a portrait of my father for me; but I do not know when he will do so, as he is so busy all the time."

"Would you charge me very much, for if you did not charge more than the money I have saved up which papa gave me, I would have you paint it—I have just forty dollars."

"I will paint it for that, miss, and you need not pay me until you get the portrait, for I will send it to you direct, and then you can tell your uncle."

"You are so good, and I will let you paint it."

"Come into the house and see which photograph you like best, and don't you wish some lunch?"

The young artist said that he was not hungry, a strange condition to find a youth in, and went into the house with her.

She showed him into the handsome parlor and went up to her room for the photographs.

The moment he was alone the young artist began to look eagerly about him, gazing at portraits on the wall, and then opening a large photograph album.

In this he seemed to find something to tempt him to break the eighth commandment, for he hastily slipped several of the photographs out and put them in his pocket.

When pretty Ethel Mountjoy returned he was admiring a large painting on the wall.

"Here are three photographs, sir, and you will return them with the portrait, won't you, for they are all that I have?"

"I will return them promptly, miss, as soon as I have finished with them, and I thank you for the order."

"May I show you my portfolio?"

Ethel was only too pleased to see it, and after half an hour the young artist took his leave, refusing her kind offer to send him to the village in a vehicle, and saying he would make his sketches of the place when he brought the portrait of her father.

She walked with him to the gate of the grounds about the house, and answered many of his questions, seemingly prompted by interest, or simple curiosity.

On his way back to the village, and, when half a mile from it, he saw a carriage coming.

"That is Mr. Mountjoy, from the young girl's description of the carriage," he muttered, and holding up his hand to the coachman he brought him to a halt.

Politely raising his slouch hat he said:

"Are you Mr. Mountjoy, sir?"

"Yes, my young friend?"

"I took the liberty of calling at your house, sir, to ask if I might make some sketches some time of the fine views, for I am an itinerant artist?"

"Then we have a bond of sympathy between us, for I am an artist also."

"Will you get in the carriage and return with me?"

"Thank you very much, sir, but I will call some other time with your permission."

"Always glad to see you—your name please?"

"Nat Chandler, sir," and bowing to Mayne Mountjoy New York Nat passed on, a grim smile upon his face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RECOGNITION.

THOUGH New York Nat, as the young itinerant artist, had told Ethel Mountjoy that he was not hungry, he would have surprised her greatly had she seen him eat a most substantial supper upon his return to Landlord Barclay's hotel that evening.

He had a long talk with the landlord, presented him with several of the sketches in his portfolio, and thus encouraged him to friendly conversation, in which the youth managed to pick up a great deal of information.

At ten o'clock he had paid his bill and gone down to the wharf to catch the night steamer up to Baltimore, telling the landlord that he would visit him again some time, as he wished to make a few sketches of scenes in the vicinity.

The steamer arrived at an early hour in the morning in Baltimore, and New York Nat was up and caught the first train for New York City.

When he arrived he took the Elevated Road up-town and went at once to the Widow Herbert's cottage.

"Oh, Nat, back so soon," cried Olive who let him in.

"Yes, I got through with my work sooner than I expected."

"You are just in time for dinner, and then you can tell me what you have accomplished."

"Much depends upon you, Olive, but we will talk it over after dinner."

Olive was anxious during dinner to know all, but New York Nat was perfectly cool and allowed Mrs. Herbert to help him several times to what best suited his taste.

When the meal was over he took his portfolio and little sachel, and, with Olive, walked out to a favorite seat of theirs overlooking the Hudson.

"Now, Nat, what do you know?" said Olive eagerly.

"I'll tell you of my trip, and I enjoyed it greatly, for it's a lovely sail down the bay, the village where I landed is a very pretty one and the little hotel is first-class."

"I pumped everybody in a quiet way and got a great deal of information."

Then I went out to the little cemetery and saw the fine tomb Mr. Keene Mountjoy erected over his adopted father and his wife.

"Not far from it was a headstone to Mr. Mark Wilton, whom Mr. Mayne Mountjoy, the outcast, killed in a duel."

"I then walked along through a beautiful country out to Wavelands, and it is a grand old home I tell you, and Ethel Mountjoy is a beauty, just the kind of a girl I'd fall in love with."

"Her uncle was away, but I played the artist racket on her, and she showed me into the house, and as I was going to paint a portrait of her father—you've got to do it, Sis, for I'm not up that fine in art, you know—she got me some photographs of Mr. Keene Mountjoy."

"While she was out of the room I hit upon an old album and swiped out of it several photographs which I will show you."

"On my way back I met Mr. Mayne Mountjoy, and playing the artist dodge again had a talk with him."

"You played a bold hand right through, Nat."

"You bet I did, and to win, Queen."

"Now, whose photograph is this?"

He suddenly placed before her a photograph which Ethel Mountjoy had given him of her father.

"Oh, Nat!"

"What?"

"It is the photograph of the gentleman I took out of the river."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly."

"And this one?"

"The same face, only taken differently."

"And this?"

"Is also of the same person."

"There is no mistake?"

"How can there be, for, was not his upturned face staring into mine all the way as I pulled ashore?"

"It is indelibly stamped in my mind, Nat."

"Then we have found that Mr. Mountjoy was the man you took from the river, beyond all doubt, and we know that he was attacked by the artist at the old home."

"Yes."

"Now, here is a photograph I took from the album at Wavelands."

"Who is it, Olive?"

"Why, Nat, it is a photograph of the beautiful lady whose portrait we saw in the artist's room on an easel."

"Yes, it is, and it is a photograph taken years ago of Miss Ethel Alden, afterward Mrs. Keene Mountjoy, the lady whom the outcast heir killed Mr Mark Wilton about."

"Nat, you are certainly gathering the threads together in a wonderful way."

"The artist has this same photograph, one a great deal worn, in his studio, and he painted the portrait from it."

"One of his paintings is a view of Wavelands from memory, and another of the little cemetery, bringing in the grave of Mark Wilton, while a third is of a river scene near the mansion, as I recognized when I saw them, and in a morbid way he seemed to wish to portray them on canvas to have them constantly before him."

"Now whose photograph is this, Olive?"

She looked long at it, and responded slowly:

"I have seen the face somewhere, but I cannot recall it."

"And this one?"

"It appears to be of the same person, but under different circumstances."

"And this one, Olive?"

"Is of a boy, but the face has a resemblance to the others I have here."

"Now here is a fourth?"

"Why it is like the painting we saw in the artist's studio, one we thought was of himself, from the descriptions you had of him."

"Yes, Olive, these are all of the same person, and taken from twelve to twenty-two or three years of age, except the last one, which was taken some half-dozen years ago, and sent to Wavelands."

"The artist made his painting from this one, and all have the same resemblance, and are the artist himself."

CHAPTER XXV.

NAT TYING THE KNOT.

OLIVE, the Ferret Queen, sat considering the last words of her clever detective brother, and did not speak for some time.

Then she asked:

"What do you make of all this, Nat?"

"First tell me if you called the special meeting of the Boy Police?"

"I did."

"And set the day and night watch on the artist's home?"

"Yes, but nothing has been discovered of him."

"I am aware of that."

"To-night 's the regular night for a meeting of the Vigilantes?"

"Yes, Nat."

"Good! we will be there and I will have something to say of importance."

"And now, Nat, your opinion of all these photographs?"

"Put your boy's rig on, Olive, and go with me down to see Mr. Vanderlip, or rather follow me there, and you shall know."

"Rig out as a messenger, and the butler will show you right in."

"I will go now."

Just half an hour after, again appearing

as an artist, New York Nat was ushered into the library where Walter Vanderlip was found, reading as usual, and taking it easy in dressing-gown and slippers.

He jumped to his feet at Nat's coming in, greeted him warmly, and said:

"Your quick return tells me that you have made some important discovery, Nat?"

"I have, sir; but the Queen will be here soon toggled out as a district messenger boy, sir, and please tell your butler to admit her, and then, sir, pardon me for suggesting it, send your man off on an errand."

"Your word goes, Nat," answered Walter Vanderlip, with a smile, and soon after Olive was admitted, with her uniform, cap and wig, looking the very picture of a handsome messenger boy.

"You two have a way of disguising yourselves that is remarkable, for no one would ever mistake you for a girl, Miss Olive."

"Now, Nat, I am all anxiety to know your story."

"Well, sir, we have found out that it was Mr. Keene Mountjoy that Olive rescued."

"You are sure?"

"What photograph is this, sir?"

"Keene Mountjoy's among a thousand."

"Here are more of them, sir, and Olive recognized them at a glance."

"Poor Keene, and what has since been his fate?"

"That is yet to be found out, sir."

"But the man who got the cabman drunk was the artist known as Mark, and he was the one who took the nut off of the axle and caused the accident."

"You told me that Mr. Mountjoy was met by a beggar in that part of town, and gave him five dollars?"

"Yes, Nat."

"Well, I believe the man was begging for a purpose, recognized Mr. Mountjoy, and then plotted to kill him."

"He was the artist Mark, that is certain, and he was Mr. Mountjoy's guide after the accident."

"I have discovered that he was dealt a blow with a monkey-wrench, for I have the wrench, and it has a red stain upon the heavier end of it, and just such an instrument, Olive thinks, made the gash on Mr. Mountjoy's head."

"The rope his hands were bound with I found a piece of where I found the wrench, and I have proof that the artist struck the blow and robbed him."

"What proof, Nat?"

"The piece of match rope, the wrench, spot of dry blood on the floor, and spots leading to the outer door of the artist's home."

"You have been there, then, as you intended?"

"Yes, sir, and took Olive with me."

"How did you get in?"

"With my skeleton keys, sir, and I'll tell you all that we discovered."

Nat then told of the two rooms and their contents, and added:

"In a tin box, taken from the chimney, we found a dueling-pistol with a telltale inscription on it."

"Also a handsome watch and chain, diamond stud and sleeve-buttons, and a morocco case with some papers belonging to Mr. Keene Mountjoy, one of them a letter of exchange on London for five thousand dollars, given by a Baltimore bank."

"And where are these things, Nat?"

"Queen, our treasurer, has them all, sir."

"Then there is no doubt but that this artist murdered my friend Mountjoy?"

"None whatever, sir."

"That leaves two things to be done, Nat."

"Yes, Mr. Vanderlip."

"To find Mountjoy's body, for I now feel that he is dead, and to find his murderer."

"I think, sir, there will be no trouble about finding the murderer."

"You expect him to return?"

"Oh, yes, sir, he will surely come back, and can then be bagged very quietly."

"And you expect trouble about finding the body?"

"Not exactly, sir; but we will begin work to-morrow on that track."

"Do you suspect Harvey Dunham?"

"No, sir, there is not a shadow of suspicion against him, as will be seen when he is well enough to talk."

"The only question is, what has he done with Mr. Mountjoy, dead or alive?"

"A most important question, indeed," added Walter Vanderlip.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SKEIN UNRAVELED.

WALTER VANDERLIP saw that New York Nat had still a secret he had not divulged, and Olive knew that such was the case.

At last Walter Vanderlip said:

"Come, Nat, out with it all, for you are keeping something back."

"I am, sir, for I did not know just how you would take it."

"Don't mind me."

"Come, out with it all."

"Well, sir, will you kindly telegraph for Mr. Mayne Mountjoy to come on?"

"Yes, for I think we have enough facts to call him on, and he may tell us about this artist, for, perhaps he knows of him, if his cousin was in anyway acquainted with him."

"Simply wire him, sir, that you think the guilty party is found, and to come on for consultation."

"All right, Nat, our messenger boy here will take the message when he leaves."

"Ask him to come direct to your house, sir, if you please."

"I will."

"Now, Mr. Vanderlip, do you know this face?"

"No, Nat, I do not, but I have seen it."

"And this one?"

"I think it is of the same person."

"And this one, sir?"

"They all have a certain familiar look, yet I do not recall who the person is."

"Of whom do they remind you, sir?"

"Well, strange as it may appear, of Mr. Mountjoy."

"Which one?"

"Mayne Mountjoy."

"They are his photographs, sir."

"Where did you get them?"

"From his cousin's photograph album at Wavelands, sir, and Miss Ethel Mountjoy gave me those of her father."

"I went there as an artist, and passed muster very well, accomplishing my purpose, for I got those photographs, had a talk with Mayne Mountjoy, heard lots of family history, saw the grave of Mark Wilton, who was killed in the duel, and from the photos discovered who it was that Olive rescued."

"You certainly have accomplished wonders, Nat."

"I have more to tell, sir."

"Well?"

"I have discovered who it was who was Mr. Mountjoy's assailant."

"The artist, yes."

"And more yet."

"Yes."

"I know who the artist is."

"What?"

"He goes by the name of Artist Mark, sir, and signs his name Mark Wilton."

"The same name as the man whom Mayne Mountjoy killed?"

"Yes, sir, and in that tin box which Olive has, is the dueling pistol that Mark Wilton was killed with, and it has on it the initials 'M. M.' and the date of the duel."

"This is strange."

"There is an old bundle of letters, in the box, sir, signed by Ethel Alden, and of a

date prior to the duel, and a ring bearing the initials 'E. A.'"

"And what do you make of all this, Nat?"

"In the box also, sir, is a well worn photograph of Miss Alden as she then was, her name on the back, and a portrait of her, painted by the artist Mark Wilton, is on an easel in his room.

"Other paintings are of Wavelands, one of the little burying ground and of Mark Wilton's grave, and scenes about Wavelands."

Walter Vanderlip gave a low whistle as though some bright light was dawning upon him through New York Nat's words.

Continuing, Nat said:

"Now, Mr. Vanderlip, I have gone most thoroughly over this whole case.

I have sifted it well, as Olive has, and I have come to what I believe is the right conclusion."

"And that is that Mayne Mountjoy is the murderer of his cousin?"

"Yes, sir, if Mr. Keene Mountjoy really is dead—which is yet to be proven.

"That this cousin hated him as the one who married the woman he loved, there is no doubt. The cousin was poor, living like an outcast, while the heir of Wavelands was rich and honored.

"He had led a wandering life, according to what he told Landlord Barclay of the village hotel—having been a soldier, miner and at last gone to Europe and devoted himself to art, for he had a great deal of talent.

"He sold only paintings enough to live on, was a strange nature, bitter, morbid and lived alone.

"He met his cousin by accident, I suppose, and plotted to kill him and then claim the property, for he was the direct heir.

"He made the attempt, took the body to his home, robbed it, then carried it to the river and set it adrift.

"Next he disappeared, believing his work thoroughly done, and turned up at Wavelands as a rich man.

"Get him on here, Mr. Vanderlip, and I'll plot to have you drive him up-town, the Boy Police will be on hand to halt your carriage, and we'll make Mayne Mountjoy a prisoner and the rest is easy."

"And he will confess all, you think?"

"No, sir; he is not of the confessing kind, for see how he came on here and talked all over with you and the chief, offered rewards and then went to Baltimore and took the daughter of the man he had murdered to her home, establishing himself as master.

"When he could do so, he intended to reappear as Mark the artist, pack up his traps and disappear from sight utterly, save as Mayne Mountjoy the millionaire.

"Oh, he is a slick one, Mr. Vanderlip."

"And you are a slick one, Nat. Why, the chief will ask me to kick him when he discovers that his Unknown Shadows have run down this case," laughed Walter Vanderlip, and soon after his two visitors took their departure.

CONCLUSION.

THAT night the Boy Police held their secret meeting in the old Haunted House, and New York Nat gave them an idea what his discoveries had resulted in establishing.

He also told them that he wished the whole force to go to work in the morning to find some clue as to what had become of the man rescued from the Hudson, and who he now told them was none other than Keene Mountjoy.

Another order was given to the Young Shadows, to the effect that six of the larger ones must report every night at dark in the neighborhood of the artist Mark's home, and have with them police uniforms to slip over their own clothes at a moment's notice, and helmets as well.

The League of Unknown Young Ferrets was then dismissed, subject to a special call,

if wanted, and Nat escorted Olive to her home at the cottage.

"Nat, there is one place we did not visit to see if Mr. Mountjoy had been left there by Mr. Dunham," said Olive as they reached the gate.

"Where is that, Sis?"

"Do you remember that there is a private hospital back from the river some distance, established by old Mr. Dunham, and known as the Dunham Sanitarium?"

"No, is there such a place?"

"There is, for I saw the sign over the gate, and was foolish not to go there, for it is just where Mr. Dunham would be most likely to take Mountjoy, where he could have every attention."

"Be up early, Olive, and I'll call for you to drive out there with me. I'll come in time for an early breakfast," and Nat seemed to feel that Olive was on the right track now.

The next morning bright and early the two were on their way to the Dunham Sanitarium.

It was a fine structure, a charitable bequest of old Mr. Dunham, and equipped with a good corps of surgeons and nurses.

Driving up to the door Nat asked one of the attendants regarding Mr. Mountjoy, and the reply was:

"We have a gentleman here whose name we do not know. He was brought by Mr. Harvey Dunham the day of his accident, and he said that he had traveled with him from Baltimore, but had not learned his name, but to take every care of him.

"He was suffering from a fracture of the skull, and it was so serious we all thought it would be fatal; but, an operation was performed a few days ago by our chief surgeon, and the patient's mind is clearing so there is every prospect of his rapid recovery now to perfect health again.

"We did not report the affair, as we wished to first consult Mr. Dunham, who I learn, this morning, is a great deal better."

Asked if they could see the gentleman, the permission was granted.

One glance was sufficient, for Olive said:

"There is no doubt now; that is the gentleman I rescued."

"His clothes bear the mark 'K. M.', and he was dripping wet when brought here by Mr. Dunham," the attendant said.

Telling the one in charge that Mr. Mountjoy's friends would call and see to his welfare, Nat and Olive drove rapidly back into the city. That afternoon the young Shadower captain called upon Walter Vanderlip and told him what he had discovered.

"Well, Nat, you have won both rewards, for you found the outcast heir, and you now have found Keene Mountjoy. My word for it, all that was promised by Mayne Mountjoy, his cousin will pay."

"Have you heard from him, sir?"

"Yes; he wired me he would arrive at seven o'clock to-day."

"All right, sir. I have six of my big boys, with uniforms along, who will be at the old mansion the artist occupied.

"If you will tell Mr. Mountjoy to drive with you up to Lawyer Norris's, I will act as your coachman, and my Boy Police will halt us right by the mansion.

"Then I will get down from the box and cover Mr. Mountjoy, and with your aid, make him a prisoner, only you need not be known to my boys in the matter."

"I understand, Nat, it is an excellent plot."

"When he is a prisoner, sir, I'll drive you back to your home, where you can have the chief awaiting him, and it would be a good idea to suggest that no publicity be given to the arrest, until Mr. Keene Mountjoy is able to speak and say what his wishes are, for, as he was not killed, he may wish to take steps to avoid a trial, you know."

"That is a wise head of yours, Nat, for, to prosecute a man whose fortune he has,

might be tortured to make my friend appear in a bad light, and especially as he married the woman whom Mayne Mountjoy loved and killed Wilton as his rival.

"You shall have your way, though, to the end, only the chief must know that again his Unknown Ferrets have outgeneraled him."

And New York Nat did have his way, for his plot was carried out perfectly, by his ally, Walter Vanderlip; and, wholly unsuspecting trouble, Mayne Mountjoy found himself a prisoner within a few yards of the old rookery where he had lived as Artist Mark.

He was taken into his studio by New York Nat, and shown that his guilt was known from beginning to end. The iron wrench was shown him, the two pieces of rope, one piece taken to bind the hands of his victim, the tin box and its contents, and then Nat said, turning upon him a face covered with a false beard, his Boy Police being similarly disguised:

"Now, Mr. Mountjoy, confess what you did with the body of your victim?"

"My dear sir, you are making a mistake that you will rue, for in spite of circumstantial evidence you have trumped up, I am not the artist you accuse me of being, or the assailant of my cousin."

New York Nat laughed, and the prisoner, well ironed, was led back to the carriage and driven to the home of Walter Vanderlip.

There the chief of the Secret Service met him, and from Walter Vanderlip heard the whole story of the man's guilt, and how, step by step, the Unknown Shadows, his Dare-Devil Detectives, had fathomed the mystery.

"I will do as you ask, Mr. Vanderlip—just cage him until his brother can be talked with," said the chief, and that night the guilty man slept in a cell.

It was a week before Keene Mountjoy could talk over the whole affair with Walter Vanderlip, and then he at once said:

"I will not appear against him, on condition that he leaves this country never to return.

"I will also place in safe hands for him enough money to give him an income sufficient to support him in comfort."

Upon these terms Mayne Mountjoy was glad to get off, and though the Secret Service chief was very loth to allow him to go free, yet he released him, but had him under guard until he had packed up his traps and taken the steamer for London.

When he knew all that the Secret Shadows had done for him, Keene Mountjoy wrote a check out for fifteen thousand dollars, which Walter Vanderlip deposited, to draw interest for them until they saw fit to divide it with the other rewards banked to their credit.

When Mr. Mountjoy returned to Wavelands, Ethel was made happy at seeing him, and also by receiving a portrait of her loved father with the compliments of the artist.

The Secret Service chief in an interview with Walter Vanderlip, acknowledged that his Unknown Ferrets were wonders, and added:

"Some day, Vanderlip, I'll turn shadower myself, just to solve the mystery of who those Dare-Devil Detectives are.

But, up to last accounts from New York Nat he had not done so, and they still do secret service as the Unknown Shadows.

THE END.

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